

## Workplace Safety

# OSHA Making Changes to Construction PPE Standard

**F**ED-OSHA has proposed new regulations that would require personal protective equipment for construction workers to be properly fitting.

The lack of access to properly fitting PPE for smaller-framed construction workers — especially women — has been a perennial problem, as ill-fitting gear may not protect employees properly in case of an incident. The proposed standard explicitly states that PPE must fit properly to protect workers from workplace hazards.

The proposed revision would align the construction PPE standard with the language in OSHA's PPE rules for general industry and the maritime sector.

## What the new standard says

Most of the gloves, goggles, respirators, harnesses and work boots that help keep construction workers out of harm's way are made for average-sized men.

When women or small men wear PPE that wasn't designed for them, they have to deal with gaps, bulges and a poor overall fit that make it uncomfortable, reduce its effectiveness and increase the risk of sustaining an injury.

## The takeaway

In the absence of current regulations, construction firms should ensure that they have different sizes of protective equipment to accommodate all of their employees. An employee with poorly fitting equipment can not only injure themselves, but they also put other workers at risk.

Manufacturers already make PPE in various sizes. If you are ordering new PPE for your workers, you should take into account that not all are 5.8 and taller and that women and some men are much shorter and perhaps weigh less as well. Even a pair of size "small" gloves may be too large for a small person.

OSHA noted in its proposed rule that an analysis it had carried out indicated that the cost to employers to comply with the new rule would be negligible.

The agency's cost analysis estimated a one-time cost to the construction industry could be approximately \$545,000 in total. ❖

## Specific dangers of ill-fitting PPE include:

- Sleeves of protective clothing that are too long or gloves that do not fit properly may make it difficult to use tools or control equipment, putting other workers at risk of exposure to hazards.
- The legs of a protective garment that are too long could cause tripping hazards and affect others working near the wearer.
- A loose harness when working at elevations may not properly suppress a person's fall and may get caught up in scaffolding and equipment.
- Goggles worn by an employee with a small face may leave gaps at their temples, allowing flying debris to enter their eyes.
- Gloves that are too large have a number of issues: the fingers are too long and too wide, the palm area too big and the cuffs allow sawdust to fill the fingers. Someone wearing such ill-fitting gloves risks getting their fingers caught in machinery and pinched when stacking or carrying lumber.

