

OSHA RULEMAKING

CONSTRUCTION PPE ‘PROPER FIT’ RULE TAKES EFFECT

FED-OSHA has finalized a new regulation that requires 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 adequately in case of an incident. The new standard explicitly states that PPE must fit properly to protect workers from workplace hazards.

Often, the industry has just purchased smaller gear for female workers, but that hasn’t worked well because women’s bodies have more variations in size and shape.

What the new standard says

OSHA said “proper fit” means that “the PPE is the appropriate size to provide an employee with the necessary protection from hazards and does not create additional safety and health hazards arising from being either too small or too large.”

Under the new rule, construction employers will be required to provide PPE in various sizes and designs that accommodate a diverse workforce. It requires that they assess the fit of PPE for each worker individually. The fit must address different body shapes, proportions and size and applies to all types of PPE.

The rule applies to PPE that an employer provides to its workers, as well as PPE purchased directly by a worker for personal use.

Required training topics

- Guide workers on how to adjust the equipment,
- How to recognize when PPE is ill-fitting, and
- How to request replacement gear if PPE does not fit.

Examples of covered items

- Hard hats
- Gloves
- Goggles and safety glasses
- Safety shoes
- Helmets
- Harnesses
- Coveralls and vests
- Respirators
- Hearing protection devices
- Boots

Recordkeeping requirements

Keep comprehensive records of:

- PPE assessments,
- Inspections,
- Training sessions, and
- Instances where PPE was replaced or adjusted for proper fit.

Dangers of ill-fitting PPE

- 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 the temples, allowing flying debris from a machine to enter the eyes.
- Gloves that are too large have a number of issues: the fingers are too long and too wide, the palm area is too big and the cuffs allow sawdust to fill the fingers. Someone wearing such ill-fitting gloves risks getting their fingers caught in machinery or pinched when stacking or carrying lumber.

The takeaway

Manufacturers already make PPE in various sizes, but finding properly fitting PPE for workers may be difficult.

Fortunately, The Center for Construction Research and Training has created [a list of manufacturers](#) and suppliers of PPE for female, nonbinary and transgender workers. It includes links to firms that specialize in women’s wear and the products they offer. ❖

