Use of Personal Protective Equipment Meeting Kit



PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Personal protective equipment, commonly referred to as “PPE”, is equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that cause serious workplace injuries and illnesses. These injuries and illnesses may result from contact with chemical, radiological, physical, electrical, mechanical, or other workplace hazards. Personal protective equipment may include items such as gloves, safety glasses and shoes, earplugs or muffs, hard hats, respirators, or coveralls, vests and full body suits.

ENSURE PROPER USE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

All personal protective equipment should be safely designed and constructed, and should be maintained in a clean and reliable fashion. It should fit comfortably, encouraging worker use. If the personal protective equipment does not fit properly, it can be the difference between being safely covered or dangerously exposed. When engineering, work practice, and administrative controls are not feasible or do not provide sufficient protection, employers must provide personal protective equipment to their workers and ensure its proper use.

TRAINING – EMPLOYERS MUST:

- Have training with “hands on” instruction in the fit, use and maintenance of assigned PPE.
- Understand the limitations of the PPE and know what to do in the event of exposure or device failure (e.g. how to use emergency showers, eyewash stations, and first aid).
- Understand when to discard/replace PPE (e.g. end of shift, every hour).
- Report any missing or defective devices to the supervisor.

WHY IS PPE IMPORTANT? – THE LAST LINE OF DEFENSE

In the hierarchy of risk control, PPE is considered to rank lowest and represent the option of last resort. It is only appropriate where the hazard in question cannot be totally removed or controlled in such a way that harm is unlikely.

- PPE protects only the person using it, whereas measures controlling the risk at source can protect everyone at the workplace;
- Theoretical maximum levels of protection are seldom achieved using PPE, and the real level of protection is difficult to assess (due to factors such as poor fit, or failure to wear it when required). Effective protection can only be achieved by equipment which is correctly fitted, maintained and properly used at all times;
- PPE may restrict the wearer by limiting mobility, visibility or by requiring additional weight to be carried.
- Use of PPE may alter employees' perception of the hazards they are dealing with.
- In this context of a last resort control measure, PPE is critically important as it is generally only used where other measures are insufficient and as such it plays a crucial role in preventing and reducing many occupational fatalities, injuries and diseases.

SELECTING, USING, AND MAINTAINING PPE

Employers are responsible for selecting, providing and fitting appropriate PPE for the hazardous exposures in the workplace. Consult the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for advice. Consider how the materials will be used, the quantity used, and the types and duration of exposure. Ensure that there will be an adequate margin of protection in case of a spill or other emergency.

DANGERS OF EMPLOYEE REFUSAL TO WEAR PPE

An employee's refusal to wear PPE may be cause for discipline, particularly if the refusal creates a risk of infection for other employees at the workplace. However, each case should be considered on its own facts and with a view to the individual employee's situation.

FINAL WORD

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is equipment or clothing worn to minimize exposure to hazards in the workplace. PPE does not remove or reduce workplace hazards, it only reduces the risk of exposure to the hazard. And most importantly, PPE only works if you use it!