Why Workers Don’t Use PPE



In a past survey, 82% of safety professionals said they observed their workers failing to use required personal protective equipment (PPE) at least once in the span of a year.

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Of course, ensuring proper use of PPE by workers isn’t just a compliance obligation; it’s a vital safety measure. So why don’t workers use the stuff?

Employer’s Fault for Lack of PPE Use

At over 85%, the most common worker reason survey respondents cited was lack of awareness about PPE and why it’s important to use. This is clearly a problem that providing appropriate safety training would solve.

Another common reason for not using PPE: the workers said that PPE wasn’t available at their workplace or that it didn’t fit right. Each of these reasons could and should have been addressed by the employer.

So, if any of your workers are citing reasons like this, shame on you.

Worker’s Fault for Lack of PPE Use

The other common reasons cited are not so much reasons as excuses by workers who understood the importance of using PPE but chose not to due to some complaint about the PPE.

Complaint – PPE Was Uncomfortable

If your workers are saying this, you can easily help them find an alternate solution – whether it’s a different style of eye protection or a better fitting hardhat. In many cases, if the PPE isn’t comfortable the worker may not be wearing it properly.

Complaint – PPE Made Them Too Hot

If your workers are finding it hot, you may want to consider checking out the temperature in the area – check your ventilation and get some airflow. This may not solve the issue completely but could help with your workers objections.

Complaint – PPE Hampered Productivity or Made Job Tasks Harder

Find out how the PPE is causing issues with getting work done. In some cases, you may be able to find a way to improve efficiencies. In other cases, you and your workers may just have to understand that in order to be safe, the work may take a little longer.

Complaint – PPE Made Them Look Unattractive

Not much to say here! It’s not about looks – it’s about being safe. End of story.

Don’t Write Off the PPE Complaints

We all understand that lack of comfort and such aren’t valid excuses for not using PPE. So, it would be easy to label the excuses as “shame-on-the worker”.

But it’s not as simple as that. At the end of the day, who’s to blame for a workers’ failure to use PPE is less important than understanding why they’re not using it and making sure they do.

So, if your workers are using excuses like “it’s too hot,” you need to know what they’re complaining about and address the problem—either by making the PPE “less hot” or getting the worker to use it the way it is. Anything less might result in an OSHA violation and a fatal or serious injury.