

SEGMENT SIX - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

After studying this segment you should have a greater understanding of the role of PPE as one of the means of reducing the level of exposure to hazard in the workplace and the place of PPE in the hierarchy of control.

AIMS OF THE SEGMENT

The main aim of this segment is to help you to understand that the use of PPE is a **measure of last resort** and be able to:

- Give examples of PPE and their function;
- State the employer's and employees' responsibilities regarding provision, use, care and maintenance of PPE.

The main aim of this segment is to help you to understand that the use of PPE is a measure of last resort. Why is this?

Health & safety legislation (and common sense) says that it is better to remove a risk than to try and control it.

In other words **PREVENTION** is better than cure.

Ways of preventing a risk include removing it completely, replacing it with something less dangerous or separating people from the risk itself.

Examples of this from the seafood industry include:

- Using compressed air driven equipment instead of electric power.
- Replacing toxic dyes (herring brown for example) with safer food colourings when smoking fish.
- Using pre-diluted cleaning chemicals rather than diluting concentrated chemical onsite.
- Separating operatives from dangerous machinery by use of a guard.

If a risk cannot be prevented then it must be controlled. Of the various types of control measures that can be used, those that engineer out the risk (e.g. reduced voltage, failsafe devices, improved ventilation) or reduce exposure (ventilation, job rotation etc) are preferred.

If exposure cannot be reduced below a safe level then the last resort is to provide workers with Personal Protective Equipment. One of the reasons that PPE is the last resort is that its effectiveness depends on the worker using it correctly. Goggles are no use if the worker doesn't wear them. But they can save your sight if you wear

them whenever they are needed.

If we go back to our falling hammer example from Segment Four let us look at the possible controls.

1. Eliminate – no-one is allowed to work from a height so no tools can possibly fall.
2. Use a polystyrene hammer so if it falls it falls slowly – not very practical.
3. Isolation – cordon off the working area so that no workers can possibly enter the danger zone below the high level worker.
4. Engineering control – all tools tethered to the worker platform so they cannot fall to the ground.
5. Reduce exposure – carry out the work when there are no workers at ground level.
6. PPE – issue everyone on the ground with a hard hat – the last resort!

In practical terms we would use several of these measures.

The work would only be carried out when necessary, the work area would be cordoned off with a barrier, workers close to the work area would be informed and instructed, access to the work area would be by permit only.

Anyone entering the work area would need a hard hat. A net might be strung under the at height work platform.

PPE for noise and exposure to hot water.



Even as a last resort there are many examples of PPE used in the seafood industry. I have listed some of the more common ones below. I would like you to add to the list and also to write down what risk they are protecting workers from.

PPE	Protects against what risk?
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Goggles	Chemical splashes in the eyes – when mixing or using cleaning chemicals.
Chain mail or cut resistant gloves	Against the risk of cuts and puncture wounds from filleting knives.
Ear defenders or ear plugs	Excessive noise in the workplace
Body warmer, insulated boots, gloves etc.	Excessively cold temperatures found in a fish market, coldstore, fish processing factory etc.
Rubber gloves	Constant exposure to water, cleaning chemical etc.

The white coat, hat and hair net that many of us wear in the seafood industry are not examples of PPE. Their role is to protect the food from us and are worn because of food safety reasons not health & safety.

So if you have to use PPE at work who provides it? Your employer of course, that is one of your employer's responsibilities.

Other responsibilities⁴ your **employer** has with regard to PPE are as follows:

- Supply of PPE to workers – **free of charge**.
- Carry out a risk assessment to ensure that the PPE is appropriate and will provide the required level of protection.
- Make sure that PPE provided to workers is used correctly. It is not up to the employee to decide if they want to wear it.
- If more than one type of PPE has to be worn, that they are compatible. For example, hard hat, ear defenders, goggles and dust mask should all work together if required.
- Maintain and replace PPE to ensure it is in good repair and working order.
- Storage for PPE – providing suitable secure storage for PPE when it's not being worn.
- Information, Instruction and Training
- Use of PPE – your employer must ensure that you wear it when necessary.

⁴ Under the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992

Employees also have responsibilities under the PPE regulations.

- You must report any loss or damage to your PPE.
- You must wear and use the PPE correctly whenever required.
- You should take whatever steps are specified by your employer to keep your PPE in good working order.
- You should take reasonable care of your PPE.
- However, you do not have to pay for your PPE, even if it is worn, damaged or lost - That is the responsibility of your employer.

SUMMARY

1. PPE is provide by your employer free of charge.
2. Employees have a responsibility to use PPE correctly.
3. PPE is the last resort when other control measures are not possible, not practicable or inadequate to protect the employee.

