

Employers: What You Need to Know

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires that employers protect their employees from workplace hazards that can cause injury. Employers must also comply with all applicable Minnesota OSHA standards.

Assess hazards

As an employer, you must assess your workplace to determine if hazards are present that require the use of personal protective equipment. If such hazards are present, you must select protective equipment and require workers to use it, communicate your protective equipment selection decisions to your workers, and select personal protective equipment that properly fits your workers.

Train your workers

You must also train workers who are required to wear personal protective equipment on how to do the following:

- Use protective equipment properly.
- Be aware of when personal protective equipment is necessary.
- Know what kind of protective equipment is necessary.
- Understand the limitations of personal protective equipment in protecting workers from injury.
- Put on, adjust, wear, and take off personal protective equipment.
- Maintain protective equipment properly.

Provide PPE

By Minnesota statute, employers must provide PPE required for employees to perform their jobs safely. PPE should only be used when all feasible engineering controls, work practices, and administrative controls have been implemented, but are not enough to adequately protect employees.

The employer's responsibility:

- Conduct hazard assessments.
- Provide PPE.
- Train staff on how to wear, care for, and store PPE.
- Enforce PPE use.
- Set an example: use PPE.

The Hazard Assessment

A first critical step in developing a comprehensive safety and health program is to identify physical and health hazards in the workplace. This process is known as a "hazard assessment." Potential hazards may be physical or health-related, and a comprehensive hazard assessment should identify hazards in both categories. Examples of physical hazards include moving objects, fluctuating temperatures, high-intensity lighting, rolling or pinching objects, electrical connections, and sharp edges. Examples of health hazards include overexposure to harmful dusts, chemicals, or radiation.

Begin the hazard assessment with a walkthrough survey of the facility to develop a list of potential hazards in the following basic hazard categories:

- Impact
- Penetration
- Compression (rollover)
- Chemical
- Heat/cold harmful dust
- Light (optical) radiation
- Biologic

In addition to noting the basic layout of the facility and reviewing any history of occupational illnesses or injuries, things to look for during the walkthrough survey include:

- Sources of electricity
- Sources of motion such as machines or processes where movement may exist that could result in an impact between personnel and equipment
- Sources of high temperatures that could result in burns, eye injuries, or fire
- Types of chemicals used in the workplace
- Sources of harmful dusts
- Sources of light radiation, such as welding, brazing, cutting, furnaces, heat treating, high-intensity lights, etc.
- The potential for falling or dropping objects
- Sharp objects that could poke, cut, stab, or puncture
- Biologic hazards such as blood or other potentially infected material

When the walkthrough is complete, organize and analyze the data so that it may be efficiently used in determining the proper types of PPE required at the worksite. Learn about the different types of PPE available and the levels of protection offered. It is a good idea to select PPE that will provide a level of protection greater than the minimum required to protect employees from hazards.

Periodically reassess the workplace for any changes in conditions, equipment, or operating procedures that could affect occupational hazards. This periodic reassessment should also include reviewing injury and illness records to spot any trends or areas of concern and taking appropriate corrective action. The suitability of existing PPE, including an evaluation of its condition and age, should be included in the reassessment.

Documentation of the hazard assessment is required through a written certification that includes the following information:

- Identification of the workplace evaluated
- Name of the person conducting the assessment
- Date of the assessment
- Identification of the document certifying completion of the hazard assessment

PPE is the last line of defense:

- Eliminate the hazard by redesigning the process.
- Substitute with a safer process or product.
- Control the hazard at the source.
- Reduce exposure through administrative and work practices.
- Use PPE as a last resort.

Source: US OSHA

For more resources and links, see mnltp.umn.edu/PPE

