



PRODUCTIVITY & COST ADVANTAGES IN PPE



LEADING COMPANIES DEPLOY EFFECTIVE PPE PROGRAMS TO DRIVE PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT AND COST OPTIMISATION – AS WELL AS WORK PLACE SAFETY.

It's a morning ritual at the job site. As starting time approaches, workers, some of whom were gathered in small groups talking casually in the dim light of the fast-approaching sunrise, and others who were sitting in their vehicles catching a few extra moments of quiet, begin to file into the site meeting trailer. Following a job and safety briefing on the day's planned activities, personnel don their basic site-required PPE and exit the trailer to perform designated work assignments.

Studies repeatedly confirm that the bulk of workplace injuries are preventable. The level of prevention achieved, however, will depend upon the manufacturer's commitment to safety and employees' willingness to become involved in injury prevention. High quality product range backed up with comprehensive employee education through ongoing training programs on the use, wear and care of personal protective equipment (PPE) is a critical first step in creating not only a safer working environment and reducing injury-related costs, but in enhancing productivity and optimising cost management.

The importance of high quality PPE combined with effective training

Effective product usage and employee compliance with safety regulations reduces a company's risk of worker injury and the resulting impact on the workplace. Educating employees about the benefits of PPE empowers them to make the right choices in using protective equipment and protecting themselves from job-related hazards.

Workers should be asked to provide input early in the PPE and training program planning process. This will not only help to ensure the training is on target, but also that product and uniform ranges are accepted and supported.

Cost and productivity advantages

PPE combined with effective training is the right thing to do for employees and the entire organisation. Because knowledge is power, education enhances employee buy-in and positive feelings around the level of safety and security of their workplace, which studies have repeatedly shown has a direct and positive correlation with productivity and business performance.

Employee training impacts the bottom line by reducing the costs associated with workplace injuries. The comprehensive cost of an injury is much more expensive than the initial medical treatment. Productivity, employee morale, client perception and even public opinion are all at risk when severe injuries are reported.

Training programs not only have the potential to reduce the direct costs associated with injuries but they can improve productivity by minimizing worker and process downtime. As an added benefit, PPE training can have a positive impact on insurance premiums while creating a safety culture that will help keep safety top-of-mind.

As an example of the advantages associated with a PPE training program, we recently worked with a large supplier of chemicals to the mining industry to solve a hand protection problem that involved the use of a chemical mixture. Workers were required to apply the mixture by hand, which resulted in a number of workers reporting skin irritation and sensitivity to the mixture.

After assessing the problem and talking with workers, we identified a solution that involved double gloving, with workers changing the outside glove at specified periods to maximize protection. Training was required for all employees so they would understand the glove changing/disposal process and the risks associated with not changing the gloves as prescribed.

Since the double gloving process was implemented and workers were trained, the company has been able to use a less expensive glove while providing better protection for its employees; safety improved while costs fell.

Is PPE training expensive?

The cost of PPE training is minimal, especially when compared to the potential costs associated with recordable and non-recordable injuries. Fines resulting from regulatory violations, increased insurance premiums, increased medical costs, and the cost of work stoppages add up quickly.

Most PPE product manufacturers provide product training for their customers at a minimal charge. They will also consult with customers to develop programs that meet regulatory mandates and insure worker safety.



Who should conduct training?

Companies are likely to handle their PPE and training programs in different ways depending upon their business requirements, audience and complexity of the training needed. Many companies will build an internal PPE program, complete with training courses, to meet their ongoing PPE and general safety training needs. Many now look to external providers such as certified product experts, industry experts, manufacturer/distributor representatives and Certified Trainers as options.

What should be covered?

It is recommended that PPE training programs address three specific areas:

- 1) Why and when PPE is needed – including the safety and business case implications
- 2) How to use the PPE
- 3) Proper PPE care and storage.

Staff must recognize the need to wear the relevant protective uniform or equipment any time they are exposed to specific workplace hazards such as chemicals, extreme heat or cold, or equipment with sharp or jagged edges.



They also must understand the type(s) of clothing and equipment that will provide the greatest level of protection for various applications. If people are provided gloves and sleeves made of Kevlar, for example, they should know why it is important for them to wear these particular gloves or sleeves and why this specific product was chosen. Ideally they will have had input into the specification and choice already.

People must also recognize that a single style of equipment rarely works for all situations and that for example wearing gloves or sleeves does not automatically eliminate a chemical hazard. Some workers assume that once they have the gloves on their hands, they are totally protected from any hazard, which, of course, is not true.

Secondly it is important for people the importance of wearing protective clothing or products provided and how to use them properly to achieve the highest level of protection and comfort. Documented cases exist where improper use has actually increased the risk of injury by creating a false sense of security. Workers wearing gloves designed to protect them from cuts, for example, must be aware that those same gloves could pose a risk when used around machinery with moving parts that could grab the glove, pull the hand inside and crush it.

It is important also that people know how to recognise when clothing and/or equipment needs to be laundered, repaired or discarded and replaced. Anything torn, split, discoloured or otherwise damaged should not be worn, and this should be backed up by policies and procedures to ensure compliance. Most manufacturers provide guidelines for cleaning, inspecting and storing their products.

Developing and implementing an effective training program

Companies have two great sources for training assistance – the suppliers they purchase PPE products from and the Internet. PPE manufacturers often offer training relative to their products at a minimal cost to their customers. Searching the Internet will help provide a list of training options for PPE and safety training.

Companies should also consider conducting an internal assessment to determine specific training needs and areas that need to be addressed relative to compliance. The assessment may be used to examine PPE distribution methods and controls and determine opportunities to standardize products, improve productivity, optimize PPE product inventory and maximize the overall performance of all PPE products.

Conclusions

Training workers about PPE products is not a hit-or-miss opportunity that is offered once a year to select employees. Rather, this type of training should be part of an ongoing and comprehensive safety program that is designed with specific objectives and targeted to all employees, depending upon their responsibilities and presence on the plant floor.

While the cost of PPE training is minimal, the benefits are quickly realized through overall cost savings relative to injuries, lost productivity and compliance. PPE training can also go a long way in boosting morale and instilling a sense of confidence that employees are working in a safe environment.



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