



85 Percent of Safety Professionals Surveyed at NSC Congress Report Observing PPE Noncompliance in the Workplace

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If there is one thing all workplace safety experts agree on it is the need for proper protective equipment when undertaking hazardous tasks.

Yet 85 percent of the safety professionals surveyed by Kimberly-Clark Professional at the National Safety Council (NSC) Congress in November 2006 said they had observed people in their organizations failing to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) when they should have been. Nearly half said this had happened on numerous occasions, while 38 percent described these occurrences as infrequent.

In addition:

- 66 percent of safety professionals said PPE compliance was an issue within their organizations.
- 40 percent described it as a “major concern” that they were attempting to correct.
- 57 percent of respondents who observed PPE noncompliance in the workplace said the workers attributed this to poor fit or discomfort.

What was the main reason for noncompliance? A feeling of invulnerability, as in: “An accident won’t happen to me.” This was selected by nearly one third of respondents from a list of choices. It was followed by:

- Lack of awareness of workplace hazards.
- Lack of training on how to don, doff and use PPE.
- Ill-fitting uncomfortable garments.
- Lack of “breathability” and inadequate supplies.

Comfort Most Important Criterion

Survey respondents were also asked about the most important criteria for selecting PPE for workers. The number one response was comfort. This was followed by quality, availability and fit. Price and size selection came in last.

Providing solutions to their problems and meeting their needs were the chief reasons for choosing a company to supply PPE products, according to more than three quarters of respondents. Offering a product bundle for a one-stop shopping experience and delivering head-to-toe protection took second and third place. They were followed by carrying well-known brand name products, just-in-time delivery, and selling specific niche items.

The most important feature in glove selection was “the ability to conduct tasks involving dexterity and/or fine motor skills,” according to nearly one third of respondents. However, 43 percent said all the choices in a list provided to them were equally important. These included “dexterity and/or fine motor skills” as well as fit, cut-resistance, chemical-resistance, working as well in wet conditions as dry, and resistance to pathogens.

These survey results demonstrate that comfort really does drive compliance. If PPE is uncomfortable or doesn’t fit right, workers may modify or not wear it properly to minimize discomfort, which may then compromise protection.

Top Workplace Safety Issues

The survey also polled safety professionals about safety issues. The top three workplace issues, selected from a list of choices, were:

- Insufficient management support and/or resources for health and safety functions.
- Under-reporting of workplace injuries and illnesses.
- Worker compliance with safety protocols.

In another question, 43 percent of respondents answered “yes” when asked whether they were concerned about any potential health and safety issues posed by re-usable rental shop towels that may contain chemical residues even after they are “freshly laundered.” Of this group, 21 percent described themselves as “very concerned” and 22 percent said they were “somewhat concerned.” Forty-five percent said they were not concerned about this issue.

Survey Methodology

The survey was undertaken at the NSC Congress in San Diego on November 7, 2006. The survey questionnaires were filled out by 158 safety professionals who reported being responsible for purchasing, selecting or influencing the purchase or selection of, or compliance with, PPE. Respondents were from the following fields: industrial manufacturing, construction, hazmat, emergency response, clean manufacturing, laboratories, medical, health care, military and law enforcement. For full survey results, visit www.kcprofessional.com.

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