



## PPE Compliance in the Workplace:

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## A Continuing Concern

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When it comes to PPE, the OSHA standard is unequivocal: *OSHA requires the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce employee exposure to hazards when engineering and administrative controls are not feasible or effective in reducing these exposures to acceptable levels.*<sup>1</sup>

Despite the clarity of this requirement, the reality is that noncompliance in the workplace continues to be a concern. Eighty-seven percent of safety professionals surveyed at the National Safety Council (NSC) Congress in October 2007 said they had observed workers failing to wear PPE when they should have been. Eighty-five percent of safety professionals answered yes to the same question in a similar survey undertaken at the 2006 NSC Congress. Both surveys were conducted by Kimberly-Clark Professional.

In an effort to understand the reasons for noncompliance, the 2007 survey asked why people failed to wear PPE when they should have been.

The main reason cited was “discomfort,” according to 62 percent of respondents who had observed noncompliance in the workplace. Next was: workers thinking PPE was not necessary for the task. These were followed by:

- Too hot
- Fit poorly
- Unattractive-looking
- Not easily accessible from the site of the work task

Given the relationship between uncomfortable PPE and noncompliance, it’s not surprising that when asked what could be improved about the PPE they were currently purchasing, three-quarters of safety professionals surveyed said they would make it “more comfortable.”

This is in keeping with OSHA guidelines for selecting PPE, which state that “employers should take the fit and comfort of PPE into consideration when selecting appropriate items for their workplace. PPE that fits well and is comfortable to wear will encourage employee use of PPE.”

The safety professionals surveyed were also in favor of more fashionable PPE. Eighty-four percent said that they would be more apt to purchase fashionable and attractive PPE if workers would be more likely to wear it and the price was comparable to what they were currently paying for similar products.

<sup>1</sup> 29 CFR 1910

The survey also asked what safety professionals sought from a supplier of PPE and other safety products. The top choice, at 86 percent, was a supplier that offers solutions to their problems. Providing innovative products was a distant second. This was followed by:

- Selling specific product categories
- Providing a bundle of products for a one-stop, head-to-toe shopping experience
- Offering just-in-time delivery
- Offering stylish products

And what about the PPE these safety professionals are using now? When asked if their current PPE met their desire to provide the best possible protection for their employees, nine out of 10 respondents answered “yes.” Of these, 35 percent were unequivocal, saying it “definitely did so,” while 56 percent said it did so “for the most part.” Seven percent said the PPE they were currently using did not provide the best possible protection for employees.

### At-Home Safety Compliance

While most discussions about PPE compliance typically focus on safety at work, an increasing number of companies are adopting the concept of “whole-person health” and the notion that it is important to protect employees off the job as well as on. This trend has coincided with a decline in accidental deaths in the workplace and a concurrent increase in injuries and deaths in the home.

Fifty-nine percent of the safety professionals surveyed at the 2007 NSC Congress said their organizations had programs in place to promote at-home safety. Twenty-eight percent said they did not have safety programs, but hoped to implement them in the future. Only 10 percent said they did not have a program nor did they have plans to create one.

Of those with existing off-the-job safety programs, 68 percent said the offerings consisted of training programs or providing training materials on off-the-job or at-home safety. Forty-four percent said they encouraged employees to take home company-provided PPE, and 16 percent said they have incentive programs for staying safe off the job as well as on. Ten percent said they allow employees to borrow high-priced safety equipment, such as gas detection equipment, for home use.

### PPE of the Future

*Safety professionals were asked which of the following innovations they would most like to see in the PPE of the future.*

PPE that automatically adjusts itself to fit different body types	36%
PPE with adjustable heating or air conditioning systems	19%
PPE that sounds an alarm when it is taken off in a work area or job site	9%
Coveralls and safety glasses that are so attractive they can be worn outside of work	9%
Coveralls with integrated pockets for MP3 players, cell phones, etc.	1%
Don't know/ None of these	27%

*Source: Kimberly-Clark Professional, NSC Survey, October 2007.*

Clearly the majority of safety professionals surveyed subscribe to the notion that safety must be practiced 24/7, not just from 9-to-5. This not only helps protect employee health but it also makes good business sense. According to an NSC estimate, off-the-job injuries and fatalities cost U.S. businesses almost \$224 billion annually in lost productivity. So whether this means wearing protective shoes and eyewear while mowing the lawn or a respirator mask while sanding floors, the goal is the same: keeping employees safe, whenever and wherever they are.

## **Survey Methodology**

The most recent survey was conducted by Kimberly-Clark Professional at the NSC Congress in Chicago on October 16, 2007. The survey questionnaires were filled out by 197 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 and science, health care, transportation, law enforcement and government. The 2006 survey was undertaken by Kimberly-Clark Professional at the NSC Congress in San Diego on November 7, 2006. The survey questionnaires were filled out by 158 safety professionals. For full survey results, visit [www.kcprofessional.com](http://www.kcprofessional.com).

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