

# PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Personal Protective Equipment or PPE, is considered essential on most farms. However, PPE should be considered the last line of defense against hazards. Controlling a hazard at its source should be the first choice of protection because this method will eliminate it from the workplace altogether. When elimination is not possible, try substitution of the material with non-hazardous ones, isolation of hazards, addition of safety features to existing equipment, redesign of the work processes, or purchase new equipment. When the hazard cannot be removed or controlled adequately, personal protective equipment is the last line of defence if the work process is to continue.

## WHAT IS PPE?

PPE is a device worn to protect a person's head, body, feet, eyes, respiratory system or ears from exposure to any harmful substance. (Examples include: steel toed boots, safety goggles, earplugs etc.)

**REMEMBER!** PPE does not remove or reduce workplace hazards, it only reduces the risk of exposure to the hazard. And most importantly, PPE only works if you use it!

## THE RIGHT FIT!

PPE doesn't protect you if it doesn't fit. PPE designed for men may not fit women properly due to differences in body size, height and shape. It can be frustrating and costly to find the right fit, but it's essential that you do to ensure your safety.



## HOW TO CHOOSE APPROPRIATE PPE

Some tips:

**PROTECTIVE CLOTHING:** Make sure to try on the clothing in a variety of sizes. Best fit isn't determined by the sizing on the clothing but rather through trying on different sizes. Sometimes men's sizes are totally appropriate and fit well, but sometimes they don't.

Rolling up sleeves or pant legs isn't a solution to ill-fitting PPE. Too long sleeves and pant legs pose entanglement and tripping hazards.

**HEARING PROTECTION:** When choosing hearing protection, make sure that whatever device you choose is comfortable. It should be comfortable enough that you won't be tempted to remove it during the duration of your task. If you chose earmuffs, make sure it provides a tight seal against the side of your head and the headband fits snugly. Also consider how heavy they are and if you'll experience any discomfort.



**EYE PROTECTION:** Beware of the “one size fits all”, some eye protection may be too big for a women’s face and hazardous materials like debris or liquids could enter through the gaps. Make sure that the eye protection you choose won’t slide off your face and is comfortable.

**GLOVES:** Make sure all skin is covered, the gloves allow for a sturdy grip and the finger length and palm circumference match the size of hands. Gloves with a sloppy fit are more likely to catch and create hazards in equipment and machinery. If you aren’t able to grip firmly, tools and other objects are more likely to slip. \*Be sure to select the type of glove appropriate to the specific hazard.

**RESPIRATORY PROTECTION:** A typical woman has a smaller face circumference than the typical man. Make sure that the respiratory protection you use has a tight seal and isn’t loose on the face.\* Different hazards require different types of respirators, be sure choose the correct respirator for the hazard.

\*Respiratory protection can be complicated and may require a trained professional to fit test. For more information about respiratory protection visit the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety OSH Answers Fact Sheet at [www.ccohs.ca](http://www.ccohs.ca) and search for “respirator selection”.

**SAFETY FOOTWEAR:** A typical woman’s foot tends to be narrower than a typical man’s foot (and shorter). Make sure to try on safety footwear. If necessary seek out manufacturers that make specific footwear that is narrower. It’s important to try these on for best fit possible. Ill-fitting footwear makes the wearer more likely to slip, trip or fall.

## ASK AROUND!

**QUICK TIP:** Asking other women in your area where they find and purchase appropriate PPE is a great first step in finding the right fit.

**REMEMBER:** You may be tempted to alter the PPE you’re using to achieve a better fit. (Shortening straps, cutting down fabric etc.) However, certified PPE is tested as is. If it’s adjusted in any way, it may lose its effectiveness.

## KEEP IN MIND YOUR WORKERS.

All workers deserve PPE that fits properly and protects them from harm. No matter the sex of your employees, make sure the PPE that you supply is appropriate and that your workers are achieving a proper fit for maximum protection.

## MAINTENANCE AND DISPOSAL

Proper maintenance requires following the manufacturer’s instructions for cleaning and storage.

### BEFORE USING PPE, IT’S IMPORTANT:

- To be trained with “hands on” instruction in the fit, use and maintenance.
- Understand the limitations of the PPE and know what to do in the event of exposure or device failure (e.g. how to use emergency showers, eyewash stations, first aid, etc).
- Understand when to discard used PPE