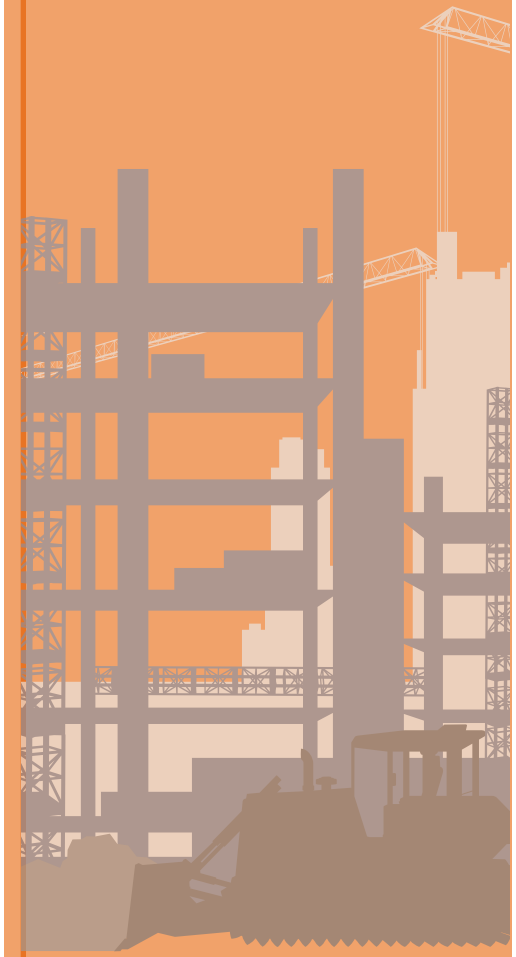
8 Ways to Get Workers to Wear Their PPE

Safety|NewsAlert



8 Ways to Get Workers to Wear Their PPE

What's the most common excuse you hear when you see workers not wearing their PPE?

- I lost/misplaced it.
- It's uncomfortable.
- I never wore it at my last job, and I've never been hurt.

Those are some of the common ones, but there are many more.

Using the right PPE plays a big role in reducing workplace safety hazards. Here are some tips from safety pros to help your workers get on board with wearing personal protective equipment:

1. Let them know it's for their protection

Getting workers to realize that wearing PPE is in their best interest can be a bit of a challenge. Here's what one company did to get their workers to use their PPE:

Workers at this company didn't always remember to wear their PPE.

When one worker got hurt as a result, the safety manager decided to put him in the spotlight. He had the worker get up at the next safety meeting and talk about how he was injured – and what he did wrong. The workers seemed to listen to what he had to say. So the safety manager decided to make it a rule that whenever someone got hurt, they had to get up and tell their co-workers what happened. Workers started wearing their PPE and performing their jobs more carefully so they didn't have to admit that they did something wrong in front of the other workers.

2. Find PPE that's the right fit for the job

These companies found some great products that work well:

- This company's workers were getting too many head injuries. Many of the workers wore baseball caps on a daily basis, but these just didn't provide protection. And hard hats weren't always the best solution for many of the tasks that the workers performed, so the company had to find another solution. The safety manager found "bump caps," which were baseball caps with a hard protective shield inside them. Since introducing the new caps, there haven't been any head injuries.

- Workers at this company had a problem with working in the heat – they'd be exposed to temperatures topping 120 degrees – and this would wear them out pretty fast. So the company found some cooling vests to help the workers out: They have pockets that hold ice packs, which keep the workers cooler longer. When the ice packs start to melt, that's a sign the worker is probably starting to get worn out. So another worker with fresh ice packs will take his place.

3. Look for adjustments to PPE workers use now

Sometimes workers want to stay safe but using the PPE that's been provided presents its own set of challenges. Some adjustments made by these companies did the trick:

Workers at this company were using protective goggles, but they'd fog up pretty fast. The workers tried using specially designed moist towelettes to prevent the fog, but they just didn't work. Finally, the safety manager came up with a great solution: He had workers wash the goggles with soapy water, let it dry, and then wipe off the residue. This method worked much better.

4. Ask workers to identify the right gear

Welders at this company were in danger of eye injuries related to arc flashes – and the company's standard safety glasses just weren't doing enough to protect them. The safety manager asked around to see if there was something better out there, and he found four possible options.

So he had his workers test them out and see which ones worked the best. Now, the workers are better protected, and the injury rate has gone down significantly.

5. Get workers talking about hazards

Here's a way you can get your PPE lessons to be more interactive – and maybe encourage workers to ditch the excuses for not wearing it all the time.

Take photos of various areas of the workplace and display them for your team to see. Ask them, "What kind of work goes on in this area? And what are some injuries you could foresee happening here?"

Since these are areas the workers have been before and know well, they'll probably have all kinds of situations they could see resulting in an accident. Some may have even witnessed these injuries or near-misses.

Then go a step further and ask, "What kinds of PPE do you think could prevent an injury here?" Most workers will name articles you already require. Some may have good ideas for added protection.

This subtly gets the message across: Workers know the dangers of the job. And they know PPE can help. But sometimes, they just need to connect the dots on their own to get full PPE compliance.

6. Change PPE location to promote safe habits

At a company where employees handled a dangerous chemical, the safety manager noticed some of them weren't remembering to use hand and eye protection. This was a recipe for disaster.

The safety manager found the problem was with the workers' access to PPE. He usually doled the PPE out to my workers as they needed it for specific jobs – and they had to keep track of it themselves. But occasionally it would get lost or broken, so they weren't always protected.

The solution: The company now has big boxes of PPE by all the work stations where workers can pick it up when they need it. Because it's visible, they're more inclined to think of their safety before they begin work.

When this change was implemented, the safety manager gathered the workers together and told them that safety would now be a team effort: The safety manager wouldn't be writing anyone up for not having their PPE.

Instead, all employees needed to work together and give each other little nudges when they forget their PPE.

It worked really well. Workers loved the new system, and now they always remember to put safety before anything else.

7. *Demonstrate why* PPE is needed

Most workers hate wearing safety goggles. Even if they understand the reasons they're needed, little annoyances keep them from using the safety gear all the time.

Things like "They fog up" or "They aren't comfortable" become

reasonable excuses in workers' minds.

Try this: Put goggles on a dummy or other stand-in for a head.

Then take a spray bottle with colored liquid (like fruit punch) in it and say, "Imagine for a minute that this is a dangerous chemical." Give it a quick spray on the dummy's face.

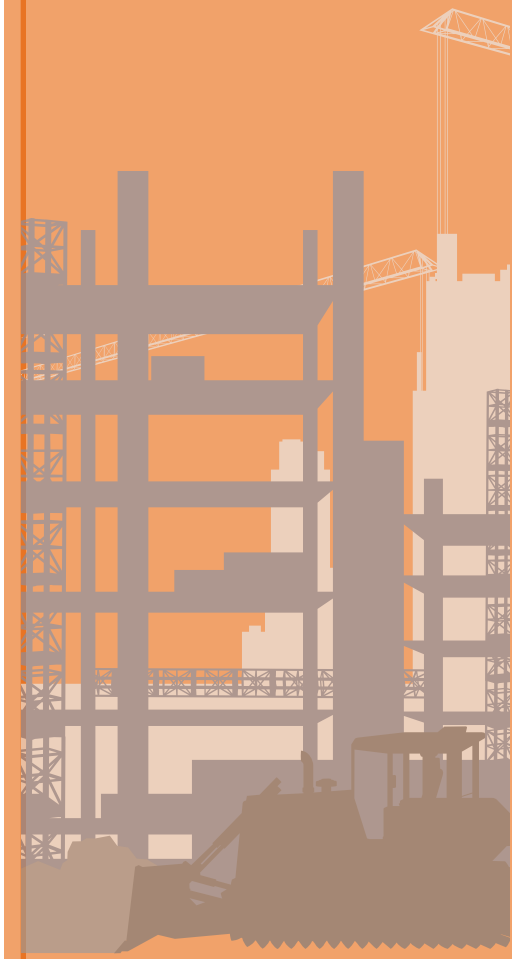
When the goggles are removed, workers will see: The eyes will be safe, while the uncovered area is exposed.

The lesson is simple. Sure, sometimes wearing PPE can seem like a drag or unnecessary. But in that split second when something goes wrong, suddenly wearing the PPE makes a lot more sense than worrying about a little fog or minor discomfort.

8. Help workers keep track of PPE

Workers losing or forgetting PPE is nothing new. Here's a quick tip you can use to make sure they're more accountable for it.

Try giving each department or team that works at your organization color-coded PPE. One team will have red helmets, work gloves, etc., another team may get all white gear. (If you can't find PPE that



comes in a variety of colors, you can use color-coded labels instead.)

Then assign a number to each member of the team. Attach that number to every piece of safety equipment they'll use – Red #1, Blue #3, etc.

That way, workers will be more conscientious about where their PPE is and always be sure to have it on the job. That leads to fewer pieces of protective equipment getting lost or forgotten – and less scrambling around trying to find replacement gear for you.

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