

Spot The Safety Violation: Avoid PPE Missteps



If you glance at this picture, you may think the workers are adequately protected. But when you look closer, what PPE errors have they made'



Wearing appropriate PPE, such as respiratory protection, safety glasses, etc., can help protect workers from injuries and illnesses when other safety measures can't eliminate or reduce safety hazards. But to provide protection, workers need to actually wear PPE and wear it correctly.

This picture shows workers who appear to be taking water samples, perhaps to test for contamination. They clearly recognize the need for some PPE. For example, they're wearing protective coveralls over their clothes. But they're also making several key PPE mistakes.

First, both workers are wearing masks. However, the worker on the left has his mask pulled below his nose, so it provides no respiratory protection at all. (It also appears that one strap on his mask isn't secured, which also impacts its fit and effectiveness.)

But the worker who's incorrectly wearing his mask is wearing boots that appear to be impermeable, which could be critical if the water being sampled does contain a hazardous substance. It's hard to see the other worker's boots but they're not the same as his colleague's.

Lastly, neither worker is wearing gloves, which is surprising given that their hands are the body part most likely to be in contact with the possibly polluted water they're sampling.

PPE BASICS

In general, use of PPE is a last resort. That is, the preference under the OHS laws is to try to eliminate safety hazards first.

If a hazard can't be eliminated, the next step is to use engineering or mechanical controls, such as machine guards, to protect workers from that hazard. If engineering controls aren't possible, you should next try administrative controls, such as lockout/tagout procedures. But if those controls aren't sufficient to adequately protect workers, then workers can use appropriate PPE (see, PPE hazard assessment checklist).

If workers *do* need to use PPE, be sure that you comply with the requirements in your jurisdiction's OHS regulations as to the specific type of PPE, such as:

- Safety footwear
- Head protection, such as hardhats
- Hand protection (see, hand safety toolbox talk handout)
- Eye protection (see, model eye and face protection policy and safety glasses toolbox talk handout)
- Hearing protection
- Respiratory protection, including how to select the proper respiratory protection and developing a respiratory protection program.

Also, you should have a PPE policy that spells out the responsibilities of management, supervisors and workers as to PPE use. And train all staff on this policy.