

Toolbox Talk: Personal Protective Equipment: Storage, Maintenance, and Care

Introduction

To protect yourself from the hazards you may encounter on the job, your employer may require you to use personal protective equipment (PPE). Properly fitting PPE is essential to prevent injuries and illnesses in the workplace. However, to ensure your PPE continues to offer the protection it's designed for, it's critical to maintain, store, and care for it correctly.



Common Types of PPE

Here are some of the most commonly used types of PPE:

- Eye Protection: Safety glasses, goggles
- Face Protection: Face shields
- Hearing Protection: Earplugs, earmuffs
- Head Protection: Hard hats, helmets
- Hand Protection: Gloves
- Foot Protection: Safety boots, shoes with protective toe caps
- Respiratory Protection: Masks, respirators

Each type of PPE is specifically designed to protect you from certain hazards. However, its effectiveness depends not only on proper usage but also on regular maintenance and correct storage.

Maintaining Your PPE

Regular cleaning is essential to keep your PPE in optimal condition. Here's how to maintain it:

- **Cleaning:** Most PPE can be cleaned using warm water and mild detergent unless the manufacturer specifies otherwise. The frequency of cleaning—whether daily, weekly, or monthly—depends on how often the equipment is used and the conditions it's exposed to.
- **Sanitizing:** If PPE is shared between employees, it must be cleaned and sanitized after each use to prevent cross-contamination.

Proper Storage

Even if your PPE is clean, improper storage can compromise its effectiveness. Here are some storage tips:

- **Avoid Contaminated Areas:** Don't leave PPE like safety glasses or face shields in dusty or dirty environments where they can become contaminated. For example, dust on safety glasses can fall into your eyes and cause injury.
- **Protect Respirators:** Respirators with organic cartridges should not be left out in the open, as the cartridges can absorb contaminants from the air, rendering them ineffective.

Storage Solutions:

- **Re-closable Plastic Bags:** Keep PPE in sealed plastic bags to protect it from dust and moisture.
- **Clean Cans with Lids:** Small, clean containers with lids can be used for items like earplugs or small tools.
- **Storage Cupboards:** Use cupboards with tight-fitting doors to store PPE when not in use.

Inspecting Your PPE

Regularly inspect your PPE for any signs of wear or damage. If you find any defective parts or equipment, immediately remove them from service and have them repaired or replaced before using them again.

Summary

Proper use, maintenance, and storage of PPE are crucial to ensuring your safety on the job. By keeping your equipment clean, sanitized, and well-maintained, you can extend its lifespan and ensure it continues to protect you from workplace hazards. Always inspect your PPE before use and store it properly to prevent contamination or damage. Taking these steps will help you stay safe and healthy while on the job.

