

EHS Daily Advisor

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT IN TODAY'S WORKFORCE

Maintaining Safety's Last
Line of Defense

Sponsored by



ABOUT THE PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) SURVEY

The Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Survey, sponsored by Bulwark FR[®], was launched in late January 2019. When the survey closed approximately seven weeks later, 429 environmental, health, and safety (EHS) professionals had shared their insights into how their organizations are implementing their PPE programs in the field alongside effective administrative policies and employee training.

Bulwark and the *EHS Daily Advisor* Research Team would like to thank all of the professionals who chose to participate in the survey, and our readers for their interest in making their workplaces safer for all employees.

All percentages in the following report have been rounded to the nearest whole percent. If you have any questions or comments about the survey, its data, or the report, please let us know via e-mail at media@simplifycompliance.com.

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TYPES OF PPE USED IN THE WORKPLACE

Our survey first sought to learn what types of PPE are used at respondents' workplaces. Survey participants could select more than one answer, and our results indicate widespread use of 12 specific forms of PPE.

- Eye and face protection **(96%)**
- Hand protection **(91%)**
- Foot protection **(85%)**
- Hearing protection **(81%)**
- Head protection **(75%)**
- Respiratory protection **(69%)**
- High visibility garments for road and construction zones **(53%)**
- Chemical protection **(49%)**
- Electrical protective equipment **(45%)**
- Body protection **(44%)**
- Flame resistant (FR) garments **(41%)**
- Skin protection **(40%)**

7% of participants specified other forms of PPE used at their workplaces, and many within this group noted that fall protection gear is commonly included in their PPE inventories.

PPE CONCERNS, REGULATIONS, AND STANDARDS

Survey takers did not rank cost among their top three PPE concerns—their focus instead centered on employee adoption of PPE and the effectiveness of the gear both from protective and regulatory standpoints.

- 1** Effectiveness at protecting from hazards **(86%)**
- 2** Employee comfort/likelihood of adoption by workforce **(68%)**
- 3** Compliance with regulatory standards **(63%)**

Our results highlight five current, new, or upcoming regulations/standards that participants plan to address with their PPE programs this year:

- Any regulation/standard related to OSHA's recently released top 10 violations **(46%)**
- OSHA General Duty Clause **(45%)**
- HazCom/GHS **(39%)**
- OSHA Walking and Working Surfaces Rule **(32%)**
- NFPA 70E 2018 **(23%)**

However, **24%** of respondents said that they do not consider regulations or standards when evaluating their PPE program—they instead base their policies on industry-specific best practices or specific hazards.



POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES

The majority of survey participants have established and continue to maintain positive policies and best practices surrounding protective equipment.

75% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their company has established an effective system for issuing, recording, and inspecting PPE and its replacement.

71% of those polled also agreed or strongly agreed that their company (or a third party hired by their company) conducts and certifies hazard assessments that evaluate worksite hazards or exposures that require use of PPE and determine which types of PPE to use.

A smaller percentage (**59%**) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they routinely conduct fit tests to determine whether the PPE properly fits the person using it.

A strong majority, **78%** of survey takers, agreed or strongly agreed that they reevaluate their PPE program periodically to ensure it is up to date and effective in preventing workplace injuries.

As for policy regarding who pays for replacement PPE when it is lost or damaged, **81%** of respondents indicated the employer always absorbs these costs. **17%** said that employees sometimes pay to replace PPE, but only if they lose the gear—not if it is damaged.



TRAINING AND PPE

While **2%** of respondents said that they do not offer any PPE training, the vast majority who do favored five training delivery methods to educate employees and/or management about their PPE program.

1 Hands-on or on-the-job training (**85%**)

2 PowerPoint® training sessions (**68%**)

3 Handouts (**59%**)

4 Classroom instruction (**56%**)

5 Videos (**50%**)

When asked how they encourage employees to attend PPE training, most respondents (**89%**) keep it simple—they make it mandatory!

However, **15%** of participants said that they offer recognition for completing PPE training, and **12%** provide paid time off to attend training. One respondent mentioned that his or her company often performs PPE training on a Saturday so that employees qualify for overtime pay.

TRAINING AND PPE



Respondents have generally created very effective PPE training programs at their organizations. 82% either agreed or strongly agreed that their employees have a strong level of knowledge regarding PPE and its proper use.

81%

of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their company has regular, ongoing, and complete training opportunities for new workers on PPE.

78%

of those polled agreed or strongly agreed that their company provides periodic refresher courses in the use of PPE for veteran workers.

84%

of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that PPE is frequently discussed in toolbox talks or general safety training at their organization.

EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES AND INPUT

While employee attitudes toward PPE may vary, our survey results show that their impressions are mostly consistent with what should be seen in positive safety cultures—as with any rule, however, reminders are often necessary.

Only **6%** of respondents said that employees at their company complain that PPE gets in the way and they resist wearing it, and **2%** said that employees wear PPE simply out of fear of being reprimanded or ticketed by safety staff.

36% of participants said that employees wear PPE consistently because they understand its role in keeping them safe.

55% of respondents said that workers generally wear PPE when required—but sometimes need to be reminded.

EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES AND INPUT

Respondents were divided on the level of choice employees at their organization have when it comes to the selection of PPE. While **52%** of those polled agreed or strongly agreed that employees at their company have full input into how PPE is selected, over one-quarter of participants (**27%**) indicated that employees have no choice in the selection of their protective equipment.

57% of participants described their company as an environment where employees have a variety of options (fits, styles, brands, and types) when it comes to PPE selection.

However, approximately one-half of respondents are reluctant to allow self-supplied PPE—**49%** of participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “Employees are allowed to supply their own PPE, and employee-supplied PPE is inspected and evaluated to ensure that it is adequately protective.”



EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES AND INPUT

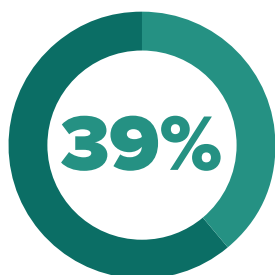
Among employers who do allow employees to supply their own PPE, they are more likely to permit certain types of equipment more than others. Below is the same list of 12 specific types of PPE from page 4. However, the ranking of this list differs in several ways: in particular, the percentages are lower across the board, and foot protection appears at the top of the list.

- 1 Foot protection **(68%)**
- 2 Eye and face protection **(53%)**
- 3 Hand protection **(41%)**
- 4 Hearing protection **(32%)**
- 5 Head protection **(28%)**
- 6 High visibility garments for road and construction zones **(14%)**
- 7 Respiratory protection **(14%)**
- 8 Skin protection **(11%)**
- 9 Body protection **(9%)**
- 10 Flame resistant (FR) garments **(8%)**
- 11 Chemical protection **(7%)**
- 12 Electrical protective equipment **(5%)**

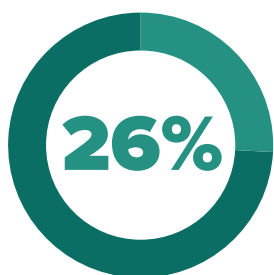
Specialized PPE, such as FR garments, chemical protection, and electrical protective equipment, were reported to be especially unlikely to be self-supplied by employees.

PPE AND TEMPORARY WORKERS

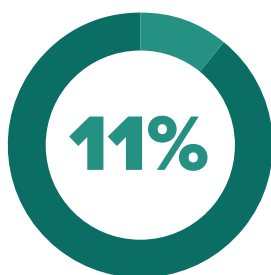
Safety management for temporary workers can be quite challenging, and PPE programs need to account for these employees. **84%** of survey participants said that their company employs contractors, subcontractors, and/or temporary workers who are required to use PPE in the course of their job duties. How this PPE is supplied to temporary workers varied across our response pool.



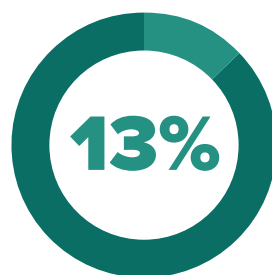
of respondents said that their company supplies all PPE as host employer.



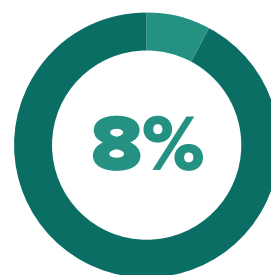
of those polled indicated that the staffing agency or contract employer was responsible for supplying all PPE.



of participants told us that PPE distribution and supply responsibilities, along with their associated costs, are shared between the host employer and staffing agency/contract employer.



of respondents said that the temporary workers supply all of their own PPE.



of participants indicated that the host employer or staffing agency only supplies PPE when the workers do not bring it themselves.

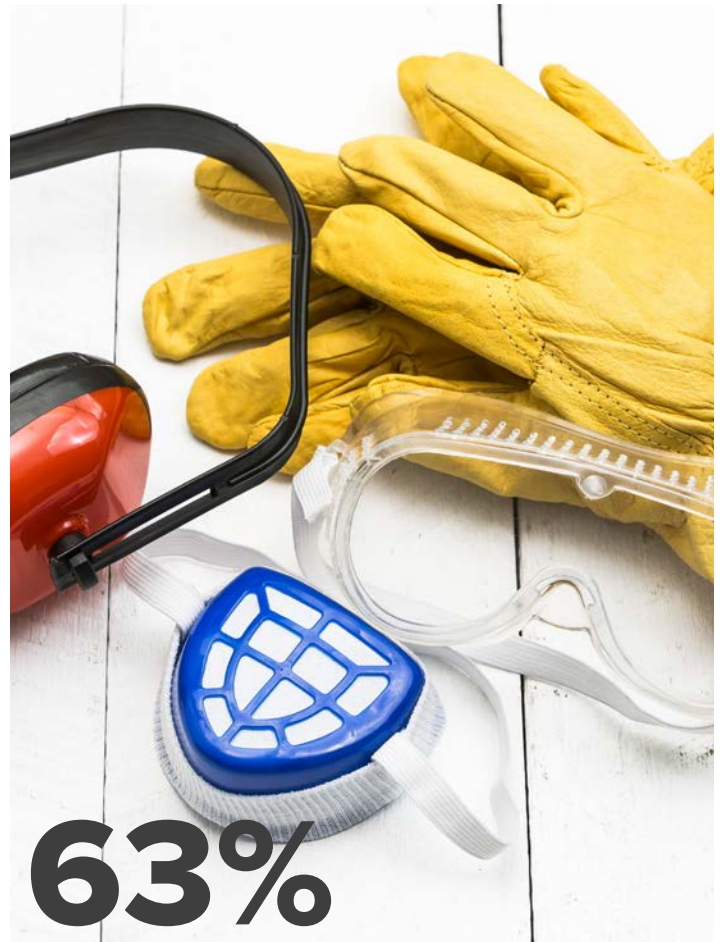
PPE AND TEMPORARY WORKERS

Fortunately, a large majority of survey respondents recognize their responsibility in ensuring that temporary workers are properly supplied with PPE. **73%** either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "It is not our organization's responsibility to ensure that subcontractors, contractors, or temporary workers are properly equipped or complying with PPE policies/programs."



64%

of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their company has a procedure in place for monitoring and ensuring the efficacy of any PPE brought on-site by subcontractors, contractors, or temporary workers.



63%

of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organization provides adequate PPE training to all subcontractors, contractors, or temporary workers, or they otherwise ensure that adequate training has been provided (such as by the staffing agency).

IMPROVING PPE COMPLIANCE

While **21%** of survey participants said that proper PPE usage is either less pressing than most of their other organizational safety issues or is not a challenge for them at all, **14%** of those polled deem use of PPE to be the biggest safety issue at their company.

31% called PPE usage “among the biggest safety issues” at their company, while one-third (**33%**) ranked it on par with other safety issues.



Since so many respondents view PPE as a critical safety issue, what can they do to improve employee compliance with protective equipment procedures and policies?

According to our survey participants, the top courses of action in boosting PPE compliance are education, training, monitoring, and—most basic—providing better equipment.

- **75%** of respondents have improved existing education and training programs
- **66%** of participants have increased monitoring of employees at their company

- **45%** purchased more comfortable PPE to boost compliance
- **36%** are providing more PPE options to workers

As with many safety-related issues, complacency is the enemy of a good PPE program—always remember to keep yourself and your employees engaged and invested in this last line of defense!

WHO RESPONDED?



The 429 participants in the PPE Survey work in a variety of job positions, the majority (**58%**) as Safety or EHS managers. A further **10%** of respondents are directors of Safety, EHS, or human resources (HR), and **9%** are frontline supervisors. The remaining **23%** of the response pool was made up of executives, managers of departments outside of the EHS function, staff-level employees, consultants/contractors, and lab safety or chemical protection specialists.

29% of respondents work at organizations that employ 500 or more employees, while **38%** reported from smaller companies of

99 or fewer employees. The remaining **33%** work at businesses that employ between 100 and 499 workers.

The top industry represented in the survey was construction, which made up **25%** of the response pool. Other industries with a strong presence in the PPE Survey included manufacturing (**23%**), government (**7%**), oil and gas (**7%**), and education (**5%**).

10% of respondents specified other industries of which they are a part, including:

- Aerospace, aviation, or defense
- Utilities
- Recycling
- Hospitality or restaurant



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