

PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

Clothing serves as more than adornment for a workers' body; it provides protection from workplace hazards. Protective clothing can range from a fleece-lined jacket to keep a worker warm to a leather apron to guard against sharp edges to a metallized suit that enables one to walk through burning wreckage at a plane crash. Safety equipment suppliers can help you identify & obtain the clothing you need to protect your workers.

Examples of workers who need protective clothing

- Welders - flame resistant clothing including caps if overhead welding is done
- Road construction workers - fluorescent reflective vests that give visibility to drivers night & day & that allow perspiration to pass through in hot weather
- Workers mixing or using acids - acid-resistant gloves, aprons, perhaps suits that encapsulate their whole bodies

Prior to purchasing protective clothing, you should identify the hazard(s) that endanger your workers. These may include:

- Corrosive/caustic or hot materials that can cause severe burns
- Hot materials that can ignite clothing
- Cold temperatures
- Toxic substances that can be absorbed through the skin
- Sharp materials that can pierce ordinary clothing & cut the workers
- Working along busy highways at night

Consider your needed resistance to permeation, degradation, & penetration

- Permeation happens when a chemical soaks through the clothing. No material is 100% resistant to permeation; however, some resist it for longer time periods.
- Degradation happens when something (*e.g. sunlight, moisture*) causes clothing to shrink, soften, become brittle, or swell. Degradation leads to increased permeation.
- Penetration happens if clothes rip, tear, or are pierced. It also happens at zippers & seams.

Consider your workers' needs for protection & your needs for productivity

Your workers move or walk about, use tools & equipment, handle product, etc.. Inadequate, excessive, or ill-fitting protective clothing can be hazardous. It can make bending, lifting, turning, & even walking more difficult & lead to tripping, overheating, & dehydration (*e.g. highway construction worker wearing a heavy reflective fluorescent vest which does not allow perspiration to pass through on a 95-degree night*). It may necessitate moving slower, handling smaller quantities at a time, & taking more frequent breaks. Inadequate clothing may increase agility at the start, but lead to decreased productivity in the long due to injury, illness, or the need for more frequent breaks (*e.g. workers in light jackets needing to warm up more often than those in parkas*). Consider durability, too. Clothing that tears easily may expose workers to dangerous conditions & need more frequent replacement than more

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durable clothing. The workplace hazards & your budget may help you determine whether to obtain disposable or reusable clothing.