



KCA TOOL BOX TALK: Providing the Right PPE for Women

Preventing the use of ill-fitting personal protective equipment (PPE) by women is a critical workplace health and safety issue. In addition to undermining efforts to protect worker health and safety, lack of adequate PPE can be a barrier to equality of employment opportunity for women. Ill-fitting protective clothing and equipment can also mean that women entering certain ‘non-traditional’ fields will be unable to perform efficiently the given tasks of the job.

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Examples of what can happen when women make do with PPE that isn't made for them:

- A woman with a small face wears the unisex goggles available. The gaps they leave at her temples allow flying debris from the machine to enter her eyes.
- A female worker using a power saw with small men's-sized gloves; the fingers are too long and too wide, the palm area too large and the cuff allows sawdust to fill the fingers. She risks getting her fingers caught in machinery and pinched when she stacks or carries boards.
- A woman who wears men's sized work boots has reported tripping while walking and climbing stairs or ladders. She also suffers from blisters and burning on the soles of her feet and because her boots are too large, her toes are not protected by the steel cap.
- The female construction worker wearing a fall protection harness that doesn't conform to her body shape and the ill-fitting device catches her in such a way that her shoulder is injured during a fall or worse.

OSHA Recommends:

- Purchasing PPE in a wide range of sizes, *including those designed for women.*
- Avoiding PPE marketed as “unisex,” “universal” or “one-size-fits-all.”
- Maintaining a directory of PPE manufacturers and suppliers and the sizes they offer.
- Allowing female and male employees to test PPE before they use it and replacing it if it doesn't fit.

To address these issues, the Industrial Accident Prevention Association and the Ontario Women's Directorate have jointly developed a directory:

[ISEA Listing of Female Personal Protective Equipment Manufacturers](#)