PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

PPE and hazard control

PPE is the last line of defence in protecting workers from hazards in the workplace. <u>Before</u> requiring workers to wear PPE to protect them from a specific hazard, the employer must try to eliminate the hazard or reduce it as much as possible. The following controls (in order from most to least effective) must be considered first:

1. Elimination: Can the hazard be eliminated from the workplace completely? For example:

- Remove an unsafe piece of equipment from the workplace.

2. Substitution: Can the hazard be replaced with something non-hazardous or less hazardous? For example:

- Replace a noisy machine with a quiet one.
- Use safer chemicals.

3. Engineering: Can the physical work environment be changed to control the risk? For example:

- Enclose a piece of equipment to contain contaminants or isolate the noise source.
- Improve ventilation or fix faulty machinery.
- Install shields or barriers to protect workers.

4. Administrative: Can changes be made to the work activities to make them safer? For example:

- Implement safety measures such as education and training, safe work procedures, supervision, signage, and good housekeeping.
- Reduce the time workers are exposed to a hazard, for example, by rotating them to another task.

5. PPE: When can PPE be used to protect workers?

If elimination, substitution, engineering, and administrative controls do not effectively control the hazard, PPE may be necessary, either alone or in addition to other measures, to help protect workers.

PPE is not the most effective safety measure because it places only a barrier between the worker and the hazard. The hazard still exists; so if the right PPE is not worn properly or when it is needed, or the PPE fails (for example, gloves leak), the worker is not protected.

For more information go to WorkSafeBC.com, OHS Regulation Part 8.