

# Alaska Municipal League Joint Insurance Association

## Loss Control Incentive Program FY 2021

---

### SAFETY BRIEF: PPE—ALWAYS IN STYLE!

Let's just admit it—Personal Protective Equipment is not the first thing that comes to mind to accessorize your outfit. Generally, PPE is not as comfortable to wear as your favorite t-shirt. But when you consider the alternatives, PPE suddenly becomes much more fashionable. Would you rather wear the goofy safety goggles today or the eye patch that hides the missing eye tomorrow? Is the respirator more comfortable for a couple of hours than the oxygen tube you will have to wear for the rest of your life after suffering lung damage? Wouldn't you rather wear the steel-toed boots than never dance again?

Personal Protective Equipment takes many forms and may be required for a wide variety of tasks, but the most commonly required PPE are items that protect your head, eyes, ears, hands and feet. The implication is obvious. Injury to any of these can make even the simplest task impossible. In fact, your quality of life can be impacted even by a minor injury to one of these body parts, so let's look at some fashion trends in safety that will help protect your body and your life.

#### Heads Up

29 CFR 1910.135(a)(1) states, "Each affected employee shall wear protective helmets when working in areas where there is a potential for injury to the head from falling objects." The standard also covers conditions where electrical hazards are present—1910.135(a)(2) states, "Protective helmets designed to reduce electrical shock hazard shall be worn by each such affected employee when near exposed electrical conductors which could contact the head."

Choose the hardhat most suitable for the work being performed, and only wear approved hardhats which have been manufactured to meet required standards and give your head maximum protection. Make sure your hat fits correctly. Hats that fit properly provide you with the most comfort and protection, and workers are more likely to wear hardhats that fit comfortably.

The ability of a hardhat to protect a worker depends on the shock absorbing space between the shell and head. This space is created by the suspension system in the hardhat. Therefore, it is important to adjust the sweat bands and suspension straps properly to provide the maximum protection. Sunlight and heat can rot the sweatband and straps, so don't leave your hard hat on the window ledge of your car. Take good care of your hard hat. Don't drop it, throw it, or drill holes in it. Inspect your hard hat every day for cracks, gouges, and frays or breaks in the straps.

Although there's no regulation against putting stickers on your hard hat, doing so prevents you from doing a thorough visual check for cracks and other damage. If you want to make a fashion statement, skip the stickers and choose one of the many "designer" hardhats. These are available in choices ranging from your favorite sports team logo to camouflage patterns.

#### Keep an Eye on Safety

The majority of occupational eye injuries are preventable with proper use of suitable, approved safety glasses, goggles, or shields. Approved eye and face protection must be worn when there is a reasonable possibility of personal injury.

- Use appropriate eye or face protection when exposed to eye or face hazards from flying particles, molten metal, liquid chemicals, acids or caustic liquids, chemical gases or vapors, or potentially injurious light radiation.



# Alaska Municipal League Joint Insurance Association

## Loss Control Incentive Program FY 2021

---

- Use eye protection that provides side protection when there is a hazard from flying objects. Detachable side protectors are acceptable. Where hazardous liquids could potentially splash the eyes, goggles must be worn for full eye protection.
- If you wear prescription lenses while engaged in operations that involve eye hazards, wear eye protection that incorporates the prescription in its design or that can be worn over the prescription lenses without disturbing the proper position of the prescription lenses or the protective lenses.

### **Hear, Hear!**

Most of us take our sense of hearing for granted—we assume that *we* hear what everyone *else* hears. Loss of hearing may not be realized until a friend or spouse screams in frustration, "Why don't you ever *listen* to me!" This is because most hearing loss occurs gradually. Normally it doesn't hurt, so we don't even realize it's happening. It doesn't annoy us like losing our eyesight. In fact, it is sometimes a blessing to tune out all the clatter and noise of our surroundings.

The critical sound level determining when hearing protection should be worn is 85 decibels, established for an 8-hour time-weighted average. The louder and longer your exposure, whether at work, at home, or during recreation, the more likely your hearing will be damaged. As a point of reference, normal conversation averages 50-60 decibels; a power saw or lawn mower ranges from 100-120 decibels.

Many disposable or reusable plugs are available, and most of these reduce noise by about 20-30 decibels. The noise reduction rating (NRR) is usually marked on the package, or on the box if they come in bulk. However, since the NRR is established in a laboratory with perfectly fitted plugs, experts recommend that the true rating is generally about 7 decibels less than indicated. Ear muff type hearing protectors are usually closer to the actual NRR.

### **Clap Hands for Safety**

Hand protection is required when employees' hands are exposed to hazards such as severe cuts or lacerations, severe abrasions, punctures, chemical burns, thermal burns, skin absorption of harmful substances, and harmful temperature extremes.

Skin contact is a potential source of exposure to toxic materials; it is important to take proper steps to prevent such contact. Select gloves based on the the material being handled, the particular hazard involved, and their suitability for the operation being conducted. One type of glove will not work in all situations.

Wear gloves whenever it is necessary to handle rough or sharp-edged objects, and very hot or very cold materials. Glove materials best suited for these situations include leather, welder's gloves, and other types of insulated glove materials.

### **These Boots Were Made for Safety**

29 CFR 1910.136 states that "The employer shall ensure that each affected employee uses protective footwear when working in areas where there is a danger of foot injuries due to falling or rolling objects, or objects piercing the sole, and where such employee's feet are exposed to electrical hazards." Protective footwear must comply with ASTM F-2412-2005, ASTM F-2413-2005, ANSI Z41-1999, ANSI Z41-1991, or be at least as effective with one of these consensus standards.

Protective footwear is designed to protect the foot from physical hazards such as falling objects, stepping on sharp objects, heat and cold, wet and slippery surfaces, and exposure to corrosive chemicals. As a



# Alaska Municipal League Joint Insurance Association

## Loss Control Incentive Program FY 2021

---

worker, you should know the risks in your workplace. When selecting footwear, consider the safety hazards in your work area. This will help you select the right protective footwear.

When selecting new protective footwear, it's important to get the right fit and comfort to prevent calluses, ingrown toenails, or simply tired feet that are common among workers who spend most of their working time standing or do a lot of walking. Although these conditions may not be considered as occupational injuries, they can have serious consequences for health and safety at the workplace. They can cause discomfort, pain and fatigue. A worker who is tired and suffering pain is less alert and more likely to act unsafely, which can cause an accident.

### **Employer Responsibilities for PPE**

Generally, the employer must provide personal protective equipment at no cost to employees where it is required. There are some exceptions, such as non-specialty safety-toe protective footwear and non-specialty prescription safety eyewear, provided that the employer permits such items to be worn off the job site. Employers are also not required to pay for everyday clothing or items used solely for protection from weather, such as winter coats and gloves, rubber boots, raincoats, sunglasses, and sunscreen.

If an employee wishes to furnish their own protective equipment, the employer is responsible to assure its adequacy, including proper maintenance and cleaning of such equipment.

Finally, the employer must assess the workplace to determine what hazards are present or likely to be present which necessitate the use of PPE and ensure proper selection, fit, and training for required PPE. An assessment checklist has been provided with this handout to help you assess your workplace needs. If your entity does not have a written PPE program and PPE is required in the workplace, contact your AMLJIA Risk Control Specialists for assistance. Additional training is available in the AMLJIA's Online University.

