



Employee Safety

## Reusable vs. Disposable PPE: Why Switching to Gear You Can Reuse Makes Good Financial Sense

Roland Jones | Jul 30, 2020

With disposable PPE in short supply and prices rising, here's why switching to reusable coated seamless knit gloves could be a smart way to help keep your workers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The use of disposable personal protective equipment (PPE)—gowns, gloves and masks—has surged in recent months as individuals, healthcare providers and businesses have sought to protect health and prevent the spread of coronavirus.

But the global supply of disposable PPE hasn't always met the demand. Even as domestic manufacturers have sought to ramp up production of disposable gear, most of the PPE purchased in the U.S. has traditionally come from overseas manufacturers that can make products at a fraction of the price of U.S.-based providers. And ongoing shortages in the global supply chain mean fluctuating prices and difficulties securing supplies, especially for smaller companies.

All these challenges provide good reasons to look into reusable PPE. After all, while disposable products may seem inexpensive upfront, the cost of purchasing the product, the vagaries of the market price when demand is high, along with the cost of waste, can make the disposable product more expensive than the reusable version in the long run.

**When buying disposable PPE is not a good option, either because it is not easy to find or prohibitively expensive, smart companies start to “think outside the box” and consider reusable alternatives.**

For example, if you've got employees using five pairs of disposable gloves each day, and you could switch to using one pair of reusable gloves every few days, launder them, and then return them to the workforce to be used again, the cost of ownership isn't more expensive for the reusable gloves, argues Nora Kirby, national account manager for *Protective Industrial Products*, or PIP, a supplier of hand protection and PPE based in Latham, New York.

## Good Hand Protection in the Workplace

Today's gloves do more than just protect—they help workers do their jobs more effectively and securely.

Having a good grip is important, and having a layer to prevent direct contact will make a worker more confident.

Using high-visibility, brightly colored gloves can be an added reminder to workers that gloved hands should not have contact with the face, nose and mouth.

Gloves can sometimes create a false sense of security. For that reason, training should communicate that touching your face with contaminated hands—whether gloved or not—poses a significant risk of infection. Workers should always consider gloves “contaminated” whether by dirt, oils, solvents or germs, and that hands must be thoroughly washed after removal and disposal.

Consider making disinfectant wipes readily available so workers can clean glove palm and finger areas. Most coated seamless knit gloves are also easily laundered for repeated and secure use.

In cases where workers may be required to work with shared keyboards or keypads, disposable finger cots may provide an extra measure of safety and alleviate anxiety.

Workers should follow ***recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*** regarding the primary method of helping prevent the spread of COVID-19: proper hand hygiene.

## The Hidden Costs of Disposable Gloves

Kirby says PIP is trying to change the perception of its customers, because when buying disposable PPE is not a good option, either because it is not easy to find or prohibitively expensive, smart companies start to “think outside the box” and consider reusable alternatives.

She points to the chart below, which demonstrates the advantage, from a cost-of-use perspective, of using an affordable, reusable coated seamless knit glove instead of a disposable nitrile glove.

	DISPOSABLE GLOVES	PIP® 33-115
Average Price per Box:	\$18/box 100/ea*	\$7.32/dz
Average Price per Pair:	\$0.36	\$0.61
Total Number of Employees:	3,000	3,000
Weekly Average Cost:	\$28,846 <small>at 4 change-outs per employee per day</small>	\$1,830 <small>at 1 change-out per employee per week</small>
Monthly Average Cost:	\$125,000	\$7,930
Annual Average Cost:	\$1.5 million	\$95,160
<b>TOTAL SAVINGS</b>		
Weekly Average Savings:	<b>\$27,016</b>	
Monthly Average Savings:	<b>\$117,070</b>	
Annual Average Savings:	<b>\$1.4 million</b>	
<b>% of Savings by Switching to Reusable Over Disposable:</b>	<b>93%</b>	

\*Price based on future costs being quoted currently for Exam grade disposable nitrile gloves  
Cost of Use calculation does NOT include hidden costs of disposable gloves related to lowered productivity or treating work injuries or skin conditions related to disposables.

Source: PIP

According to PIP calculations, the average company with 3,000 employees that currently pays 36 cents for a pair of disposable gloves and switches to paying 61 cents for a pair of reusable coated gloves (in this case PIP's *33-115 reusable seamless knit polyester glove with polyurethane coating*) can achieve monthly average cost savings of \$117,070.

Reusable gloves make excellent alternatives to disposable PPE because they can be laundered and sanitized for reuse, making them not only cost-effective and environmentally friendly, but also a great way to get your workforce back into a worksite quickly—instead of waiting for an expensive consignment of disposable PPE.

"If you can't get the disposable PPE that you need, do you simply not open your facility?" Kirby asks. "That's not a realistic option for most companies."

The reusable gloves have additional advantages to being cost-effective over disposable gloves, says PIP:

- With fewer gloves on inventory, inventory space isn't as tied up as it would be for disposable gloves.
- A breathable polyester glove liner keeps your hands dry, while the glove's polyurethane coating on contact areas protects against shared surface contact.
- A proper fit increases comfort and reduces hand fatigue.
- Reusable gloves mean you avoid exponentially rising prices due to pandemic-related demand.
- Lower waste and pollution implications.

It's worth remembering that disposable nitrile gloves are not always the best option for manufacturing settings, as they are not designed to be as long-lasting or as protective with occupational hazards.

They are made of a thin layer of rubber, typically for one use. Thicker rubber gloves may appear more durable, but like disposable gloves, they can be uncomfortable when worn for long periods of time, making your hands sweat, and so are more susceptible to harboring germs and bacteria.

PIP's coated seamless knit gloves are form-fitting and have breathable liners. The contact part of the hand is coated with a polymer rubber or polyurethane, making it ideal for preventing direct contact with shared surfaces or items.

## Protection Across Many Sectors

Founded in 1984 by Joe Milot and Wellson Tao, PIP has since grown into a safety products supplier with some \$650 million in annual sales. The company now serves customers in sectors such as industrial, construction, food safety, electrical safety and welding safety.

Under the current “new normal” environment, with demand high and supply of disposable PPE low, PIP has differentiated itself by providing an alternative to PPE: protective work gloves that can be washed and reused.

“There is not just a supply issue, but also a scarcity of material and labor that has meant the cost of disposable garments and gloves has shot up exponentially,” Kirby says.

The company offers 11,000 products in 15 product categories, from hand protection to respiratory safety, and has a strong commitment to research and development, with a team of over 60 people dedicated to product development and new technologies. The company has developed over 100 new products in the last 12 months.

PIP’s go-to-market strategy is intimately linked with its distributor-partners. The company does not sell directly to customers but instead works with distributors to sell its products, working on training and doing joint calls. PIP differentiates itself by a combination of product and value-added service, Kirby says.

“Our salespeople focus on training because we know that is the No. 1 need for our distributor partners,” she adds.

“Close to home, we manufacture high cut-resistant gloves and sleeves, hearing protection, hard hats, face shields and hearing protective muffs,” Kirby says. “At the same time, we have long-standing partner factories around the world making key products for us. We have strong product and R&D teams in the USA, Canada and Asia who work with these partner factories to develop new technologies and ensure compliance specifications are met.”

*How are you managing to meet your PPE needs? Are you purchasing reusable PPE to save costs?*

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