



Safety

Food Safety PPE: A Guide to PPE Selection in Food Manufacturing

Roland Jones | Feb 25, 2021

The proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the food industry offers many benefits to customers, employees and the food products themselves. Here's what you should consider when selecting PPE for this industry.

The global food industry is heavily regulated, so the success of any food processing facility depends heavily on the safety of its workers and the cleanliness of the work environment. Any safety issue or food contamination could have significant health and financial consequences for a company.

The proper selection and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is therefore vital. It helps to prevent food contamination or injuries to workers from such factors as cuts, burns or chemical exposure.

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly raised the industry's protection stakes. Food production and delivery has been an essential service over the past year. According to a *recent Food Industry Executive article*, industry players say their current biggest challenges include issues such as employee safety and productivity, and adapting their business strategy or operations in response to the pandemic.

"The protection offered by PPE is one of the last lines of defense against injury. To encourage employee use and compliance, garments and other protective products should fit well and be comfortable to wear."

Creating a safe work environment around food processing and production requires smart PPE selection. Here are some important considerations when selecting food safety PPE for food industry workers.

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No. 1: Types of Protective Materials

PPE used in the food production industry must both protect workers from cuts or mechanical injury and

ensure food products do not become contaminated. These risks are particularly high in an industry where many operations are done by hand. Contamination can have a major impact on food quality and shelf life and can negatively impact a company's reputation.

Reusable vs. Disposable PPE?

Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, increased global demand for items such as face masks and shields, gowns, coveralls, gloves and protective eyewear has led to shortages of PPE, which is worn to reduce the transmission of disease. And with the United States reopening workplaces, the need for PPE remains strong.

PPE comes from both domestic and international sources. But with heavy demand the global supply of PPE is tight. This has led manufacturers to consider purchasing reusable PPE. While disposable products may seem inexpensive, fluctuating market prices and uncertainty of supply can make disposable products more expensive than reusable versions in the long run.

You can read more about the pros and cons of switching to protective gear you can reuse [*here*](#).

Disabling workplace injuries—which may include cuts, burns or musculoskeletal disorders—**cost U.S. businesses more than \$59 billion annually**. These injuries can lead to physical and emotional pain and suffering, loss of earning capacity or permanent health issues. Workers in the food manufacturing sector may face a higher likelihood of being injured on the job. Yet these accidents can be mitigated with fairly straightforward safety measures or increased employee training.

To avoid contamination of food, DuPont recommends **garments made from its Tyvek and Tychem materials**, which the company says are “designed to help prevent contamination from dust particles, bacteria, spores and parasites carried on regular clothing or the human body.” For workers, **DuPont's Kevlar yarns** provide protection against injuries such as knife cuts or from manufacturing machinery.

Read more: Eye Protection Guide: Picking the Right Safety Glasses and Goggles

No. 2: Fit and Comfort

The protection offered by PPE is one of the last lines of defense against injury. To encourage employee use and compliance, garments and other protective products should fit well and be comfortable to wear. If safety equipment or apparel feels restrictive or interrupts a worker's ability to do a job, it's more likely to not be worn.

As **the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) notes**, PPE that does not fit properly “can make the difference between being safely covered or dangerously exposed,” and it “may not provide the level of protection desired and may discourage employee use.”

Companies should also ensure they are promoting a workplace safety culture that focuses on the importance of PPE use, as well as providing ongoing training to boost employee compliance. OSHA recommends employees be trained to know at least the following:

- When PPE is necessary for food safety
- What PPE is necessary for food safety
- How to properly put on, take off, adjust and wear PPE
- The limitations of PPE
- Proper care, maintenance, useful life and disposal of PPE

You can read about creating a PPE assessment plan for your business [here](#).

Read more: Workplace Fall Protection: How to Use a Safety Harness and Lanyard

No. 3: Types of PPE for Food Safety

Workers in the food industry require protection in a range of circumstances, from avoiding cuts to preventing food contamination.

A range of good PPE options are out there for every circumstance. Here's a rundown of some of the most common protective equipment:

- Cut protection: working with blades, knives or cutting machines can lead to serious injuries, making thick, ***steel mesh-lined gloves*** vital.
- Thermal protection: Extreme temperatures are commonplace in this industry, making thermal protection gear essential. This includes gloves, ***face shields and eye protection***.
- Noise protection: PPE such as ***earmuffs or earplugs*** can help to mitigate the hearing damage caused by the loud noises that are often a feature of food processing facilities.
- Fall protection: Slips, trips and falls are common, due to the liquids used in food preparation and cleaning. ***Floor mats*** and slip-resistant shoes can help reduce these injuries.
- Chemical protection: ***disposable coveralls***, face shields, eye protection and gloves can protect against chemicals, sprays and splatters. ***Chemical-resistant shoe covers*** can also help. ***Respiratory protection*** may also be required if toxic fumes are present.

Read more: Air Filtration: What Are MERV Ratings and How Do They Protect Your Workers?

How are you making sure your employees are safe at work? Share your thoughts in the comments below.