

Member Communication Experience

Proper Fit, Safer Sites: Why Size-inclusive PPE Is Essential For Today's Construction Workforce

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Investments are transforming into large-scale infrastructure and industrial projects across the U.S., and contractors are preparing for a new phase of sustained building activity. This momentum brings opportunity, but also intensifies long-standing workforce pressures that the industry must address to remain competitive.

The latest Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) [outlook](#) shows strong growth in construction of data centers, manufacturing and power facilities, as well as other infrastructure building. The report also notes that contractors plan to hire additional employees – yet finding qualified workers remains a top challenge. To stay competitive in the upcoming wave of building projects, contractors must prioritize diversity among their workforce. Today's construction crews look markedly different than they did even a decade ago, let alone 50 years ago.

Today, women make up slightly more than [11%](#) of the United States construction workforce. That number is anticipated to grow as our economy grows, as we continue building U.S.-based manufacturing and data center facilities and more and more women choose building and trades careers. Yet, in this [survey](#) from The Center for Construction Research and Training, 77% of tradeswomen said they were exposed to unnecessary hazards because of ill-fitting personal protective equipment (PPE). That's a major industry issue today.



In January 2025, The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) finalized a [rule](#) revision to its personal protective equipment standard for construction to explicitly state that PPE must fit properly. OSHA's Personal Protective Equipment in Construction standard emphasizes that properly fitting PPE is a critical and required component of an effective occupational safety and health program. The requirement applies to all construction workers – including women and those working in certain specialized trades.

Ensuring that protective equipment fits a diverse range of body types isn't just about comfort, it's about safety and compliance. This deeper dive into the risks associated with improperly fitted PPE outlines best practices to help protect employees while keeping jobsites fully compliant.

RISKS OF ILL-FITTING PPE

Poorly fitted PPE introduces new safety risks – compromising protection and, in some cases, creating additional hazards.

Workers cannot perform at their best when their gear is uncomfortable. Equipment that is too large or too small can cause distractions, restrict movement, and lead to muscle strain as workers adjust or struggle to keep their protective gear in place. Consider the following scenarios:

- » Clothing that is too long or loose increases ‘caught-by’ and ‘trip and fall’ risks.
- » Improperly fitted gloves can cause a worker to get caught in machinery.
- » Reflective strips on standard-sized high-visibility vests or pants lose their effectiveness when worn on smaller body frames. Misplaced or obscured by folds and gaps in the fabric, these strips fail to provide the necessary visibility and safety intended by the design.
- » Improperly-secured safety glasses mean workers are vulnerable to chemicals and dust.
- » Men’s work boots are often too large for a woman’s foot, leading to discomfort and blisters. More critically, an improper fit can leave the toes misaligned with the steel toe cap, reducing protection and increasing the risk of injury.
- » Oversized helmets can shift or wobble during use, obstructing vision and causing headaches or neck strain. In some cases, they may even fall off, leaving the worker unprotected from head injuries.
- » An improperly fitted harness can increase the risk of suspension trauma and, in severe cases, result in fatal injuries.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SAFEGUARDING YOUR CONSTRUCTION TEAM

Most contractors emphasize the importance of safe work practices and stay current with evolving jobsite safety and compliance regulations. The best contractors go a step further: embedding safety into their culture and demonstrating it through everyday actions.


In a time when attracting and retaining skilled workers is often cited as the industry’s greatest challenge, investing in properly

fitted and task-specific PPE is a clear way to show employees they are valued. This commitment – which is also now a requirement – enhances safety and also fosters a workplace environment where people are proud to belong.

Here are best practices to mitigate risk to your team’s safety, your Experience Modification Rate (EMR) and your Lost Time Incident Rate (LTIR), as well as meet the latest OSHA rule revision:

- » Make use of available resources. A wealth of online materials exists to help employers and employees maintain worker safety and ensure jobsite compliance. For example, OSHA and The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) developed an [alliance](#) that provides guidance and training on worker safety rights and employer responsibilities. The site resources include a sample request for fitted PPE gear, informational videos, and more.
- » Break free of the unisex and one-size-fits-all belief. Keep an inventory of PPE in a wide variety of sizes and fabric types for men and women to meet each employee’s gender, shape, size, and cultural practices.
- » Prioritize quality and proper fit when selecting safety gear, rather than focusing on cost. While buying in bulk may save money, poorly fitting PPE can put lives at risk. Encourage employees to exchange ill-fitting equipment for correctly-sized replacements.
- » Empower your team to advocate for themselves and one another if they see or experience improper-fitting PPE on the jobsite. Provide regular training to ensure all workers understand the importance of PPE and the risks associated with ill-fitting equipment. Enforce strict compliance. Non-adherence to proper PPE use should not be tolerated.

PREPPING YOUR TEAM AND COMPANY FOR SUCCESS

Successful employers instill confidence and safe working practices in employees by properly training them and outfitting them for the work they do each day. Employees are ready to work hard and work smart. When they’re properly supported, that dedication drives higher productivity and stronger profitability. Most importantly, it ensures that every worker returns home safely to their family at the end of the day. 



About the Author

[Karyn deLeon](#) is president, CEO, and founder of [Peregrine Solutions, Inc.](#), a construction management owner's representative and Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) partner serving government agencies and prime contractors. A recognized industry leader and frequent presenter on financial and project controls and construction project management, Karyn is focused on driving corporate growth while delivering trusted expertise that protects and advances owners' interests.

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