PPE Doesn’t Replace Thinking: Human Behaviour AND Gear Stats and Facts

FACTS

- **PPE Is the Last Line of Defense:** PPE does not eliminate a hazard – it only reduces the consequence of exposure. When it fails or is misused, there is nothing left between the worker and the hazard.
- **Wearing It Wrong Is the Same as Not Wearing It:** A respirator that does not fit, gloves of the wrong material, or eye protection worn on the forehead provides no meaningful protection – and creates a false sense of security that can be more dangerous than no PPE at all.
- **PPE Cannot Override Poor Decisions:** A hard hat does not compensate for standing under an unsecured load. PPE is designed to mitigate residual risk after all other controls are in place – not to substitute for thinking.
- **Comfort Drives Compliance:** Workers who find PPE uncomfortable or difficult to use are more likely to remove it. PPE that workers will not wear provides no protection whatsoever.
- **Hazard Changes Require PPE Changes:** The equipment required for one task may be entirely wrong for the next. Transitioning without reassessing PPE leaves a worker unprotected without knowing it.
- **Inspection Is Not Optional:** Damaged, degraded, or expired PPE may look functional while providing significantly reduced protection – gloves with micro-tears, hard hats past service life, and spent respirator cartridges are all invisible failure points.
- **Behavior Determines Effectiveness:** The most advanced PPE provides zero protection if not worn correctly and consistently for the full duration of every exposure.

STATS

- Approximately 60 % of workers who experienced eye injuries were not wearing eye protection at the time – or were wearing the wrong kind – according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- NIOSH reports approximately 2,000 U.S. workers sustain job-related eye injuries requiring medical treatment every day – nearly all preventable with correct PPE selection and use.
- Nearly 2 million U.S. workers wear improperly fitted respirators, significantly increasing their risk of airborne hazard exposure, according to NIOSH.
- Proper use of PPE at construction sites can prevent up to 37.6 % of occupational injuries and diseases, according to OSHA.
- Inadequate PPE is linked to nearly 30 % of workplace injuries in Canada, according to WorkSafeBC data.
- EU-OSHA reports that 60 % of all workplace accidents have causes related to human and organizational factors – including improper PPE use.
- In Canada, over 277,000 lost-time claims were reported in 2022, with PPE non-compliance identified as a contributing factor across multiple injury categories, according to the Association of Workers’ Compensation Boards of Canada.