

Gloves

Selection, use and maintenance

Should gloves be worn?

The three steps in determining whether gloves should be worn for protection in the workplace are to identify each hazard, assess the risk of injury or harm and consider the means to reduce the risk from the hazard.

If it can be clearly shown that:

- > there are situations at work where risks to safety and health by skin exposure are unavoidable; and
- > methods of control other than protective gloves are not reasonably practicable

then the employer has a legal responsibility to provide suitable protective gloves to each employee who may be exposed to risks.

All protective gloves provided must comply with Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 2161.1:2000 – *Occupational protective gloves – Selection, use and maintenance*, and be compatible with:

- > the wearer;
- > the work to be done; and
- > any other personal protective equipment required to be worn.

Who wears gloves?

Occupations where workers are required to wear gloves include:

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Butchers | Health workers |
| Cleaners | Horticultural workers |
| Cold storage workers | Laboratory workers |
| Electricians | Labourers |
| Food workers | Welders |
| Hairdressers | Riggers |

This information
bulletin is intended
to provide guidance
to employers and
employees for the
selection, use and
maintenance of
personal protective
gloves.

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Employer responsibilities

In addition to providing adequate gloves as necessary, employers must also provide the following:

- copies of MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) at the workplace for each hazardous substance so that appropriate gloves are provided according to the MSDS;
- instruction/training in the use of gloves;
- supervision of employees to ensure the gloves provided are used as required;
- adequate information about hazards and risks resulting in the use of gloves;
- a record of the gloves identified and chosen for the task; and
- the manufacturers' instructions for the cleaning and storage of the gloves.

Employee responsibilities

Employees have a responsibility to:

- use as instructed the protective gloves provided by the employer;
- inspect the gloves before and after use to detect weaknesses or defects;
- wash and thoroughly dry hands before wearing gloves and immediately after removing gloves;
- ensure existing cuts, scratches etc are covered with a clean dry dressing prior to wearing gloves - keep the dressing dry at all times;
- report to their employer if damaged gloves are not readily replaceable;
- comply with manufacturers' warnings;
- dispose of contaminated gloves properly; and
- remove contaminated gloves prior to handling other items.

Choose carefully

Before gloves are purchased, consider the following:

- the hazards the hands will be exposed to;
- the type of material(s) that will give appropriate protection;
- how much manual dexterity is needed;
- the style of glove that would be suitable;
- whether the gloves are a good fit (employees should be able to try on samples); and
- the range of glove sizes available;

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- whether the gloves are acceptable to the wearer (eg cultural differences may rule out the use of materials such as pigskin);
- what cleaning and maintenance will be needed; and
- how often the gloves need to be replaced.

For more information on selecting gloves refer to:

- the MSDS for any hazardous substances used;
- the manufacturers or suppliers of gloves; and
- *AS/NZS 2161.1:2000 - Occupational protective gloves - Selection, use and maintenance and AS/NZS 2161.2:1998 - Occupational protective gloves - General requirements.*

Working near machinery

Take care to ensure the gloves fit correctly to reduce the risk of entanglement with moving parts of machinery.

Some gloves may not be safe to wear when working with machinery, eg mesh gloves while using a bandsaw.

Working with hazardous substances

A protective glove can fail to protect the user from exposure to hazardous substances if any of the following occurs:

- degradation;
- penetration; or
- permeation

Common signs of failure include:

- wear between the fingers;
- seam failure;
- cracking, bubbling or 'pinholes'; and
- swelling or shrinking after use.

Gloves with obvious weaknesses or faults should be discarded.

Sun exposure

Employees are at risk from exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR), which causes skin cancer. Outdoor employees are most at risk, but indoor employees who go outside for short periods may also be at risk.

Even in winter it is important to protect hands from the sun, as sunscreen does not offer 100 per cent protection. Gloves should be made of SPF 30+ sun protective material.

Skin irritation associated with wearing gloves

On occasions wearing gloves may cause skin irritations due to:

- > a build up of moisture inside the gloves;
- > substances being handled getting inside the glove; or
- > an allergic reaction to the glove material.

Dermatitis is an inflammation of the skin. This inflammation occurs when a substance comes into contact with skin. The skin is irritated and there is an abnormal reaction.

Some irritating substances affect the skin immediately and are obvious. Other substances may be used for a long time prior to the skin reacting.

Latex sensitivity is when the proteins in the natural rubber latex of the glove cause an allergic reaction by the wearer.

AS/NZS 2161.2:1998 *Occupational protective gloves - General requirements* requires manufacturers to list on the packaging the substances used in the gloves and whether the substances are known to cause allergies. This list may be useful in providing a choice of alternative products such as low allergy natural rubber, powder-free latex or PVC gloves.

Anyone with latex sensitivity should avoid contact with latex products and choose non-latex gloves. Employers should provide powder-free or low allergen gloves wherever possible.

Reporting skin irritation

Employees who experience any signs or symptoms of irritation such as itching, redness, peeling, cracking or bleeding of the skin on the hands must report this to the employer immediately. In some cases medical treatment may be required, and/or different tasks allocated.

Acknowledgement: This bulletin was prepared in consultation with the Hazards Advisory Committee of the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health.

It is available on request in other formats to assist people with special needs.