



# The master

Most plant engineers will be more than familiar with the hazards that lie in wait for them and their teams when carrying out their everyday duties. Along with the plant owner, they will have taken all necessary measures to ensure that all safeguards are in place – including providing the right personal protection equipment (PPE).

Why? Because, they will also be aware of the main requirement of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at Work Regulations 1992, which is that ‘such equipment is to be supplied and used at work wherever there are risks to health and safety that cannot be adequately controlled in other ways’.

Employee safety remains paramount and the legislation around personal protective equipment reflects that. But how do you tell counterfeit goods from the authentic?  
Brian Wall finds out

However, those self-same regulations also require that PPE is: properly assessed before its use, to ensure that it is suitable; maintained and stored properly; provided with instructions on how to use it safely; and used correctly by employees. Now, do we match up?

“To allow the right type of PPE to be chosen, carefully consider the different hazards in the workplace,” advises the HSE. “This will enable you to assess which types of PPE are suitable to protect against the hazard and for the job to be done. Ask your supplier for advice on the different types of PPE available and how suitable they are for different tasks. It may be necessary in a few particularly difficult cases to obtain advice from specialist sources and from the PPE manufacturer. Another useful source of information is the British Safety Industry Federation [BSIF: [www.bsif.co.uk](http://www.bsif.co.uk)].”

## Illegal products

Again, most plant engineers will be fully cognisant of these prerequisites, and have built them into their organisations’ procedures. However, one area of PPE that is giving cause for deep concern is the increasing emergence of fake and illegal products being manufactured and sold within the PPE industry. During recent years, a plethora of items have entered the marketplace – from gloves to high visibility vests – all of which have been produced using sub-standard materials. What’s more, many of these products are finished such that, to the untrained eye, it is difficult, if not impossible, to see that they are not quite the ticket.

Where do these counterfeit products spring from? “Many arrive in containers from the Far East and can be readily purchased via online auction sites or from street markets,” states BSIF chief executive David Lummis (pictured above right). “It is quite easy to buy containers of ‘safety’ equipment

direct. And, of course, without the correct quality control procedures in place, buyers will not have a clue what they are purchasing – thereby potentially endangering lives.”

For Lummis, it is not surprising that purchasers of PPE are becoming more wary about procuring items. His concern, however, is that there remains general confusion over certified products, mainly due to counterfeit items having falsified certifications and the potentially confusing CE symbol that may stand simply for 'China Export'.

Nevertheless, he says, there are measures at hand to ensure employers are buying and supplying the correct equipment. And he points in particular

that will suit everyone and be compatible with other PPE may become complicated,” continues Ness. “Partnering with a specialist supplier like Arco... can be beneficial, in terms of expert advice, particularly for employers that require a range of PPE types across different applications or sites.”

Why? Because, for many plant engineering teams, the other issue is rationalising their PPE product inventory. That is fundamental to improving compliance, but it is also the way to ensure that engineers, technicians and other operatives are happy to wear what they're given. What's more, it's the surest way to save money and many, many man-hours of PPE review every year. **CE**



# forgers

to the BSIF's Registered Safety Supplier Scheme, introduced in 2009, which allows members to identify themselves as having made a formal declaration that they are selling only products known to be genuine and legal. This declaration is, as a condition of the scheme, audited through provisions set out within the company's ISO9001 certification.

“Purchasing the right PPE is a big responsibility, and safety equipment that doesn't perform properly isn't just inconvenient – it may actually cost lives,” warns Lummis. Ensuring that suppliers are bona fide in this way should help to obviate most of the issues surrounding fake PPE, ensuring that the right equipment for the task is identified and purchased.

## Fit for purpose

However, even assuming PPE is genuine and of the appropriate standard, choosing a garment or product that is fit for purpose may still be challenging. A lot depends on the complexity of the job and/or the nature of the working environment.

“In the case of high visibility clothing, for example, the risk assessment may identify a need for BS EN471 compliant, Class 1, 2 or 3 garments,” explains Paul Ness (right), Arco's divisional director. Class 1 garments offer the lowest level of protection, while Class 3 provide the highest. Specific information on class requirements is available freely from the HSE and, in order to comply with the BS EN471 standard for high visibility clothing, each garment must carry a CE mark, stating its type and class.

“But couple the requirement for high visibility with protection against chemicals or oils, wet weather or extreme cold, heat exhaustion, or electric shock, and the task of selecting garments

## Lone worker protection

One area where personal protection is high up the agenda – but with a different slant – is when workers are away from base, alone and maybe also vulnerable. By providing lone worker protection functionality, managers can buy peace of mind, but also save money.

It's worth bearing in mind that the Health and Safety Executive estimates the cost of a single physical assault to an organisation as being in excess of £20,000. Compare that with the cost of implementing an effective training and lone worker safety solution, which runs out at around 50p per day per person, and the potential savings are impressive.

And remember, the hidden costs of failing to protect vulnerable lone workers also include: management time (reporting on and investigating incidents is expensive); and providing temporary staffing (agency staffing comes at a price). Additionally, there will be issues such as increased workload for the rest of the team in providing cover – with consequent stress and reduced morale – and the impact of poor customer service, resulting from overworked and demotivated staff.

So what is available? Mobile computing equipment provider Psion and Connexion2 say they are now working together to enable enhanced lone worker protection for users of Psion devices in the field.

For those in the dark, Connexion2's Identicom mobile is the original BS8484-compliant lone worker application for mobile computing devices.

Workers who need access to mobile computing and who also periodically face elevated risk in their work can benefit from the functionality of Identicom and the rugged nature of Psion's handheld devices, say the two companies.

Meanwhile, Guardian24, another provider of lone worker personal safety solutions, has launched its app for BlackBerry smartphones. BS 8484-compliant, the software allows users to log their whereabouts and daily tasks, send GPS locations and raise an alert in time of need.

Should a worker's safety be compromised, he or she can summon emergency help with the press of a panic button on the smartphone, even if the keyboard is locked. Guardian24 also features a 'listen live' function that opens a communications channel with the security services, giving up-to-date details about the user and his or her location, so that appropriate assistance can be rushed to the scene.

