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TIME TO CHANGE

MODERN WORKPLACES ARE PRESENTING NEW CHALLENGES IN THE SELECTION OF CUT RESISTANT HAND PROTECTION



Just as today's workplaces look nothing like those of twenty years ago, personal protective equipment (PPE) is increasingly being developed to specifically address the new challenges and safety risks that contemporary work environments present.

While broad technological advances continue to deliver process improvements and transform virtually every industry sector, they also shift parameters when it comes to PPE performance expectation. Combined with a greater understanding of the impact that operational environment and work practices have on employee health, this transformation has altered the landscape for safety and operations managers aiming to minimise risk.

Focusing on the primary risk and failing to consider additional hazards or environmental circumstances is a common problem when selecting suitable PPE, particularly in industrial settings where multiple threats are present.

Thanks to improvements in design, material fabrication and production techniques, PPE products can now provide suitable defence against a range of seemingly unrelated hazards – particularly in the area of hand protection – providing a reliable and comfortable option that permits workers to safely carry out required duties.



Workplaces look nothing like those of twenty years ago



GREATER CUT RESISTANCE

Exposure to sharp materials and subsequent cut risk is a common threat in most working environments. Even performing safe tasks like general warehouse duties can leave workers vulnerable to cut injury.

The 2016 revision of the EN 388 mechanical protection standard included labelling changes designed to facilitate easier selection of cut resistance gloves. It introduced an alphabetic cut level rating from A to F which assigns a protection level that spans minimal (A) through to extreme (F) risk.

Given the wide-ranging exposure in many workplaces, it has become common to implement a policy of cut level C protection as a minimum. Level C offers defence in activities deemed high risk, including glass or metal sheet handling, hardware assembly, raw materials handling, glass manufacturing and stamping.

Regardless of application, safety gloves must be comfortable and breathable, minimising the likelihood of removal. They must additionally offer the dexterity and grip needed to carry out duties as required.

Fortunately, manufacturing and material advances have delivered specialised knitting technology that blends engineered, synthetic and natural fibres into high performance yarns. These are used to create gloves that combine high cut protection with exceptional comfort and dexterity, delivering the optimum solution in terms of both safety and wearability.

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TOUCHSCREEN COMPATIBILITY



The increased use of touchscreen technology has created a new safety challenge. Machine operators, maintenance workers and staff performing data input, stock receipts and materials ordering are now required to interact with smart phones, tablets and other touchscreen devices.

It is not practical – or advisable – to continually remove and re-don PPE to utilise touchscreens. This not only jeopardises safety, but also negates any efficiency gains delivered through use of the technology in the first place.

Touchscreens fall into one of two categories: resistive or capacitive, with industrial controls generally utilising resistive technology. Most safety gloves will work with resistive touchscreens, provided they offer the appropriate flexibility and dexterity required to perform tasks. When using capacitive touchscreens, workers need gloves that feature either a conductive coating or are constructed from fabric that incorporates conductive threads.

ESD or anti-static gloves are not suitable for use with either resistive or capacitive touchscreen technology, nor are bulky general-purpose gloves that limit the user's movement. The optimal glove choice offers defence against other present hazards, including cut resistance, while still delivering adequate flexibility, dexterity and comfort to encourage all-day wear.

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SKIN HEALTH AND COMFORT

Delivery of a safe workplace includes provision of PPE that itself offers harm-free protection, so consideration of allergies, skin health and other comfort factors is a top priority when assessing glove solutions.

Workers are most likely to remove gloves that are uncomfortable or cause irritation, putting them at risk of injury. Certain glove materials have been found to cause issues for some wearers – in some cases due to latex or chemical allergies. Understanding the link enabled manufacturers to develop alternative options, leading to hand protection solutions designed to offer the protection and safety required while still addressing a range of allergy profiles.

That same focus on skin health and comfort continues to deliver new advances, including lightweight breathable designs that workers don't want to take off. Gloves today are lighter and thinner, while offering three or four times the cut protection of previously available alternatives.



Gloves today are lighter and thinner, while offering three or four times the cut protection



CUTTING THE COMPLEXITY



The evolution of modern workplaces will continue to throw up new challenges, which manufacturers of safety solutions will strive to anticipate and meet. When aiming to provide a safe environment, elect to work with a vendor that provides detailed specification information and can offer a product selection service geared to your specific application, ensuring that worker safety remains your priority...whatever new challenges arise.

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