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Every organisation is legally obliged to maintain a safe working environment and the Facility Manager will regularly be involved in the carrying out of risk assessments to identify workplace hazards and the steps required to minimise the risk of harm they may cause. The minimising of workplace risks will often require the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). The use of such PPE is covered by the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992.

PPE is defined in the Regulations as 'all equipment (including clothing affording protection against the weather) which is intended to be worn or held by a person at work and which protects him against one or more risks to his health or safety', This includes items such as safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and safety harnesses.

The main requirement of the Regulations is that PPE is to be supplied and used at work wherever there are risks to health and safety that cannot be adequately controlled in other ways. The Regulations also require that the equipment is properly assessed before use to ensure it is suitable; is maintained and stored properly; is provided with instructions on how to use it safely; and is used correctly by employees.

Where PPE is necessary, employers must provide it to employees free of charge. Self-employed people are also required to obtain it for themselves. If employment has been terminated and the employee keeps the PPE without the employer's permission, then, as long as it has been made clear in the contract of employment, the employer may be able to deduct the cost of the replacement from any wages owed.

Vital to the protection strategy is the correct selection of the PPE. Detailed information should be obtained from manufacturers and suppliers of PPE, and it is helpful to involve those persons who will actually have to use the PPE in the selection process. The nature of the task and the demands it places upon the worker should be taken into account, such as the physical effort required, length of time the PPE is to be worn, and requirements for visibility and communication.

The Health and Safety Executive has a free leaflet on PPE available for download from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indq174.pdf>