

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

What is it, when do you need it, how to use it, and where do you get it.

COVID-19 has touched each of our lives in many ways. Most states have enforced stay at home measures which have resulted in massive unemployment, stores and restaurant closures or limitations, schools conducted online and many businesses not deemed essential have temporarily closed their doors. As essential businesses remain in operation, the need for [Personal Protection Equipment \(PPE\)](#) has become a concern as it now involves protection against the airborne Coronavirus. According to OSHA it is the responsibility of employers to provide employees PPE and most realize that properly protecting employees' results in operational stability, not to mention the moral idea of keeping those that work for us safe.

What are the PPE requirements necessary today for envelope manufacturers? Typical PPE has always included things such as hearing protection, safety glasses, work gloves, hard toe shoes and sometimes hard hats to name a few, but what is necessary to protect employees from the Coronavirus? Well, besides the normal PPE we now have COVID-19 PPE which includes surgical style gloves, face mask, face shields and protective gowns. To be clear, not all employees need to be suited up with everything. That really depends on the position and risk level of each individual.

How do we know what PPE should be used and when? We know that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends all individuals to use a face mask when in public places like the grocery store and pharmacy. That is considered minimal protection and really doesn't protect yourself as much as minimize the exposure you may give to others. As the government reopens the economy, many organizations are requiring face masks before entering their establishments. Is that enough for envelope manufacturers? Again, that depends on the risk level of each work area.

Each facility has at least three risk levels: Low, Moderate and High. Lower risk areas such as office workers can usually get by with using only a face mask and gloves as long as good hygiene, safe distance rules are being observed and proper cleaning of the facility. The factory floor and warehouse is an area that should be of moderate risk as often social distancing can be a challenge and multiple people may use the same equipment or machinery at the same time. It is recommended that in addition to face mask and gloves individuals should wear face shields to better protect from the virus. Some positions may even warrant high risk equipment. High-risk areas and positions should include the face mask, gloves, face shields and gowns. An example of this need would be any individual who is administering temperature checks with employees and visitors as they enter the facility. Custodial personnel also should don the higher level protective gear as they are in secondary contact with almost everyone in the building. In

all risk levels proper hygiene and social distance measures should be in place wherever possible.

Having the proper PPE is only effective if it is used correctly. The most important factor in using PPE is to ensure donning and doffing procedures are adhered to per the manufacturers guidelines. Washing hands before and after wearing the equipment is also critical. One must avoid touching exposed areas of the equipment. For example, many people have been wearing a face mask in public but some may lower it so their nose is exposed or they may touch the mask with their hands which defeats the purpose of having it on. Proper disposal of PPE is also very important. These items should not be mixed with other refuse but should be discarded in biohazard or clinical waste bags. Items that can be reused must be washed or cleaned thoroughly between each use. The CDC website has guidelines for the [correct usage of PPE](#) as does [OSHA](#). Remember to always follow manufacturer's instructions as well.

Finding PPE for your facility may be a challenge. Early on, the rush to obtain these items has led to hoarders and price gougers. Most items have started to become available on the internet and some stores. The harder to get equipment such as respirators and respiratory masks are now better controlled by the government so hospitals and healthcare workers can get what they need first. Other items such as face masks, face shields and protective gowns are now manufactured by non-conventional organizations. EMA has several companies that have manufactured PPE equipment: [Kenmore Envelope](#) is producing face shields and [Innovative Film Solutions](#) is offering protective gowns. Many other companies switching gears to produce the necessary items in light of the pandemic can be found on the internet along with blueprints and guidelines on how to make your own in house.

Many of us are wondering what the new normal will be and that answer is not known at this time. This is new ground for everyone, but one thing for sure is it will not change overnight. Right now the normal is to continue wearing face masks in public and follow social distancing guidelines. As stores and businesses reopen, some are establishing guidelines to follow in order to enter. Some stores are requiring that face masks be worn. Capacity is limited to 25-50% so we may need to wait to enter. Stricter guidelines such as temperature checks may also be enforced.

Our work environments need to take an extra step to keep employees safe as well, so that equipment continues to run and the products continue to be delivered. Some engineering and administrative controls may become permanent. As we establish these changes in our operations, we need to continue to keep lean manufacturing principles in mind so the most productive procedure can be implemented. No doubt social distancing can hamper operations, but the opportunity to streamline still needs to be considered. It may include moving or rearranging equipment or adding additional shifts to the work schedule.

As rumblings of a resurgence in the fall, or the fact that one may get the virus more than once leads me to believe the measures we're taking now will continue until there is a cure and who knows – maybe beyond that. Invest time now to plan out these changes in the most productive and efficient method possible.