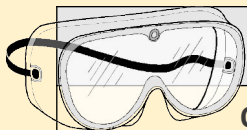




OBJECTIONS TO PPE AND HOW TO RESPOND

A cheat sheet from the Laboratory Safety Institute
Labsafety.org

GENERAL OBJECTIONS		
Objection	Possible accommodation / solution	Possible response
“It takes too long and I’m just here for a minute.”	Make PPE readily accessible and easy to put on and take off.	Mention that serious injuries and deaths that have occurred during brief, incidental, or unguarded moments (e.g. Elizabeth Griffin). labsafety.org/memorial-wall
“I’m just visiting this lab and don’t know where to find PPE.”	Ensure PPE is available with clear signage indicating its location. Require orientation / training for anyone new to the lab.	Offer assistance to locate PPE.
“I didn’t know I had to wear them for _____ task or in _____ location.”	Ensure safety protocols are clear and consistent in safety documentation, trainings and signage.	Reference documentation relevant for location or situation. “If safety instructions are unclear or inconsistent, can I count on you to let us know so that we can revise?”
“The activity I’m doing isn’t hazardous. / Hazardous activities are ‘far enough’ away.”	Hazard determinations should be made beforehand by those with authority and training to do so.	Reference the hazard assessment. The assessment may need to be revised.
“These clothes / shoes are the only kind I have.”	If reasonable accommodation is not possible without compromising safety, it may be necessary to refuse entry to the lab.	“May we provide you with some?”
“I have a right to wear / not to wear this.”	“	Acknowledge the importance of personal liberty. If the person becomes upset, try to de-escalate in a professional manner.
“We’ve never had an accident.”	“	“That’s wonderful! What do you feel is an acceptable number of times for serious injury to occur in a lifetime?”
“I’m willing to take that risk.”	“	“Others in the lab may not be.” “Even so, the employer would be held responsible for an accident.”



EYE PROTECTION

Objection	Possible accommodation / solution	Possible response
"My eyewear fogs up."	Ensure proper fit. Wash lenses with soap and water. Use shaving cream, anti-fog eyewear or anti-fogging spray. Lower the humidity of the room with air conditioning. If wearing a mask, seal nose area with surgical tape (but see footnote #2).	"This is just the type of problem that chemistry was meant to solve!"
"Safety glasses don't fit over my prescription glasses."	Prescription-compatible eyewear is required in 29 CFR 1910.133(a)(3) . Prescription safety glasses are available.	"Most PPE manufacturers make Over the Glasses (OTG) versions of their products."
"I'm wearing safety glasses. Why do I need splash goggles?"	None.	"Splash goggles form a seal against the face to protect against harmful spray coming from any angle, including behind you."
"I'm wearing a face shield. Why do I need eye protection?"	Consult 29 CFR 1910.133 and ANSI Z-87.1 for guidance on when a face shield should be worn with goggles.	"
"I'm working in the biosafety cabinet / fume hood / glove box so I already have the sash / window in front of me."	Consult equipment safety documentation for instructions relevant to specific equipment.	"Accidents have occurred when the sash was raised for only a brief moment. PPE protects against fires, explosions, hood malfunction and dangers behind you."
"They keep slipping off my face." "They hurt my ears." "They give me an awful headache."	With some research, it is possible to find eye protection that comfortably fits a wide variety of head sizes and face contours.	"May I help you find one that fits better?"
"It gives me acne."	Wash face and equipment before and after use.	"Let's protect you and your face."
"I can't do computer / microscope work with eye protection on."	Determine why using the equipment is challenging with PPE. It may be possible to change the work process to resolve the issue. Consider relocating the microscope or adding shielding.	"Your work is important. Your eyes are also important. Risking personal injury puts your work at risk."
"Sunglasses will protect my eyes from lasers, right?"	None.	"Even laser safety glasses offer no protection unless they are rated for the specific wavelength and optical density of the laser."
"If something flies, I will put my hand in front of my eyes."	None.	"Due to the presence of kryptonite, your superpowers cannot be used inside this lab."



MASKS/RESPIRATORS

Objection	Possible accommodation / solution	Possible response
<p>“I can’t breathe.” “Carbon dioxide builds up in the respirator and I can’t think.”</p> <p>(facepiece respirators, gas masks)</p>	<p>OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134(d)(1)(iv): “The employer shall select respirators from a sufficient number of respirator models and sizes so that the respirator is acceptable to, and correctly fits, the user.” Try changing filters or replacing mask. People with pulmonary or cardiac issues should not wear certain respirators. See manufacturer’s instructions.</p>	<p>Offer assistance.</p>
<p>“I can’t breathe.” “Carbon dioxide builds up in the mask and I can’t think.”</p> <p>(surgical masks, N95 respirators)</p>	<p>While surgical masks do not change the gas mixture of the air you breathe, they can cause airflow resistance. See the American Thoracic Society’s study. Slow down or take a break in a place where the mask can be safely removed.</p>	<p>Offer assistance. Suggest frequent breaks.</p>
<p>“I need to be able to smell in the lab.”</p>	<p>The molecules responsible for most smells are generally very small and pass easily through a surgical mask, although some facepiece respirators may impair the sense of smell.</p>	<p>“The risks that arise from the inability to smell are usually outweighed by the risks that arise from not wearing a mask.”</p>





LAB COATS

<p>“The lab coat is too hot / too tight / too loose / too long / too short.” “The sleeves drag in my work.” “It might get caught in the equipment.”</p>	<p>Find a coat that fits. Lab coats need not be fashion-tailored, but sleeves should not drag and it should provide adequate body coverage.</p>	<p>“Lab coats protect your clothing and prevent cross-contamination inside and outside the lab. FR lab coats could save your life in the event of a fire.”</p>
<p>“Someone else wore it and it’s not clean.”</p>	<p>Lab coats should be laundered on a regular basis. Possibly arrange for lab personnel to have their own coats.</p>	<p>“Clean is important. Safety is more important.” Offer assistance.</p>
<p>“I’m allergic.”</p>	<p>Reasonable accommodation may be possible, such as using hypoallergenic detergent.</p>	<p>“What is the nature of your allergy?” Offer assistance.</p>



EAR PROTECTION

<p>“The noise isn’t that loud.”</p>	<p>Decibels can easily be measured on a smartphone app. See 29 CFR 1910.95 for exposure limits.</p>	<p>“Hearing loss takes place little by little over time. An increase of just a few decibels can dramatically increase long-term damage.”</p>
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Objection	Possible accommodation / solution	Possible response
“Don’t ear pods work as ear plugs?”	None.	“Ear plugs are designed to <i>reduce</i> sound volume and form an airtight seal. Ear pods may not seal well, and are designed to <i>produce</i> sound, which may prevent you from hearing important warnings.”
“Noise-cancelling headphones are good enough, right?”	None.	“Noise-cancelling headphones are designed to enhance the music listening experience. Noise-reducing ear muffs are safety equipment designed to protect your ears.”
 GLOVES		
“I’ll just wear two pairs of gloves. It’s cheaper than buying those others.”	Use the correct gloves for the substance(s) being handled, based on information from the glove manufacturer.	“Wearing two shirts will not stop a bullet better than wearing one, but a bulletproof vest might. Specific gloves protect against specific substances.”
 FOOT PROTECTION		
“Safety shoes are actually more dangerous than regular footwear because with enough pressure, the steel toe will amputate the section of foot underneath.”	See 29 CFR 1910.136 .	“Watch Myth Busters episode 42 . Tests show substantially more foot damage is caused when regular boots are used.”

FOOTNOTES:

1. Many issues can be resolved ahead of time by providing sufficient training, signage, and/or fitting.
2. PPE modifications such as extra padding or tape may lead to unanticipated hazards. Always follow instructions from the PPE manufacturer.
3. At times, a thorough assessment may reveal that the hazards associated with using certain protective equipment pose a greater risk than not using it. Consult a safety professional for guidance.
4. If the ADA is cited as a reason not to use PPE, review the safety-related exceptions in [28 CFR part 36](#).



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