

Personal Protective Equipment for Summer Safety

Despite long days and high temperatures, municipal departments should continue to emphasize personal protective equipment (PPE) for outdoor work. The Comp Alliance frequently gets questions from our members about appropriate clothes for summer staff. In general, our advice is to maintain safety first. Second, avoid heat-related injuries and consider personal comfort. For example, while long pants are necessary for some roles, they can be made of lightweight, sweat-wicking material.

Overall, pants and shirts should be made from breathable fabrics that are moisture-wicking, pulling sweat away from the body, and many now include built-in UV protection. Shirts and pants made from linen, polyester, and nylon blends are good for summer and should be loose-fitting. Cotton, while breathable, can absorb sweat, making it heavier and uncomfortable. Cotton shirts should be changed out more frequently during hot, humid weather conditions.

Consider the following routine tasks and their appropriate PPE:

Mowing and Weed Trimming

Lightweight pants should be worn to protect the legs from flying debris such as sticks and rocks. Eye protection is required for weed trimming, and hearing protection is standard for both lawn mowing and weed trimming due to the noise levels of the equipment and the potential long-term exposure.

Ditch Work, Excavation, and Digging

A heavier pair of pants is advisable, especially when there is potential for contact with abrasive soil and machinery. Eye protection and hard hats are standard face and head PPE. Additionally, gloves should be worn to protect hands from abrasions, blisters, and vibrations. Depending on the closeness of equipment, such as an excavator or truck, hearing protection may be necessary. Work boots are crucial protection against falling objects and for managing rough terrain.

Flagging and Work Zone Operations

Flaggers must wear high-visibility clothing with reflectivity, which can be made from a lighter fabric for added comfort. Employees in the work zone need work boots, heavier pants, gloves, and hard hats. Furthermore, if flying debris is likely, flaggers should wear eye protection.

Returning to the common request for employees to wear shorts, we remind you to focus on employee safety. Pants are required for each of the above work scenarios. If there is no exposure to flying debris, abrasive conditions, equipment contact, insect bites, or infections from plants (i.e., poison ivy), then shorts may be approved for summer workers. Ensure your employees utilize the appropriate PPE for their job functions so they return home in the same condition they arrived.