

# **PPE Fit or Fail? Workplace Design Rethink for a Thriving Workforce**

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## **ABSTRACT**

A survey of women in the New Zealand and Australian resources industry was undertaken to understand whether personal protective equipment (PPE) was fit for purpose, or more importantly 'fit for female purpose'. A key question posed by the survey was 'Do you accept ill-fitting PPE'? The response by 88% of survey participants was that this is what is required to work in the mining industry. This is not a great result for female inclusion.

In terms of PPE supply, workwear designed for the female form is readily available, however when it comes to other safety items such as gloves, masks and gumboots the same is not true. These essential PPE items are a unisex, one size fits all design, with sizing based on the average sized male which proves unsuitable for the average sized female.

PPE workwear designed specifically for the female body is available. However, the survey results show this is still not routinely being provided to female workers. For instance, survey participants were asked if 'the PPE work wear available is designed for women?' and 64% said it wasn't.

Some PPE safety items exist, developed by suppliers who have listened to feedback from their female customers. However, there are still gaps in products on the market such as steel toed gumboots, and the availability of those items on site.

PPE is the last line of defence to protect workers from risks, and the right PPE has a positive impact on the health, safety and well-being outcomes of the mining workforce. Employers have a duty-of-care to supply workers with PPE that is fit for (female) purpose. Everybody has a right to a safe and healthy workplace.

This paper discusses these issues, presents survey information, and provides insights and recommendations for the mining industry about Female PPE requirements.