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9 Tips to Help you Manage your Supplies for Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE)



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→ PERSONAL RESPIRATORY PROTECTION SYSTEMS

“Unprecedented.” “New normal.” “Stay safe and well.” “PPE.” These words will stand out in our vocabulary as we ease ourselves forward through the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact is far reaching, from making personal decisions about our social distancing to global shortages in mobile phones and graphics cards. Focussing on the latter, how can we ensure consistent supplies in this new world? This guide seeks to share some ideas how you might achieve this.

The Importance of RPE

Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE) protects the user against risks to their respiratory system by restricting contamination from inhaled infectious or hazardous particles.

RPE is divided into two main groups according to the source of air – air purifying (negative pressure system) or air supplying (positive pressure system).

There are a number of variations available from disposable and reusable units to half and full masks; as well as wide variety of hoods and helmets.

The most advanced group of RPE - powered air purifying respirators (PAPR) - provides a high level of protection even for long lasting applications.

The recent pandemic has highlighted both the importance and value of sourcing an accredited and consistent supply of RPE.

The Impact of COVID-19 on International Supply Chains

With global demand for respiratory protection increasing, international supply chains have struggled to maintain consistent deliveries. COVID-19 is a worldwide pandemic and supplies are channelled to those who need it the most.

As we know, infection and self-isolation can affect all aspects of an international supply chain from the factory to shipping and delivery to warehouse and sales. Costs can escalate as demand increases; panic buying takes over and supply



becomes limited or runs out. Ordering stock becomes haphazard with variations in both quality and price; leaving managers feeling out-of-control with escalating costs and last-minute orders.

The Consequences of Unreliable Ordering

If you cannot source PPE adequately, productivity may go down or your employees may start to provide their own gear.

Costs may spiral and technical standards or fitting may be overlooked or not be appropriate to the task in hand.

So, how can we maintain supplies of this vital safeguarding equipment?



How to Manage your PPE Supplies

1 **Plan ahead.** Review your stocks now and note equipment or workwear that is used intensively or running low.

2 **Secure stock now** when stocks are plentiful, and prices are low.

3 **Order online.** Some suppliers provide an online order portal tailored to your own chosen products and budget. The benefits of an online system are numerous, especially across multiple sites, and include:

- direct access to stock across all your sites.
- improved order accuracy.
- inventory restricted to approved equipment and technical standards.
- greater budget control, reporting and visibility.

4

Keep a sensible stock of PPE available, including replacement parts. This will avoid last minute panic buys which can push up prices or lead to inconsistencies in the quality of PPE provided. Suppliers recommend holding 3 months rolling stock which they can sometimes hold for you if onsite storage space is limited.

5

Build a relationship and keep in touch with your supplier. Agree how often you would like them to contact you or when you want to be alerted about price increases or stock availability. When stock is scarce, suppliers need to prioritise orders and are more likely to reward loyalty or fulfil forward or repeat orders.

6

Choose suppliers who hold stock in the UK. It is always worth asking the question about the locations for production and stock holding. Seek out suppliers with manufacturers in Europe to cut out lengthy and unpredictable transport times. One only needs to think of the Suez Canal to be reminded about lengthy delays. Check delivery timescales as well. Some suppliers are still able to offer 24-hour delivery time scales.

7

Use disposable head tops, suits, and gloves for dirty jobs where equipment or laundry costs are high or for visitors who may only need protective clothing once.

8

Check how easily the respiratory equipment can be decontaminated and re-used. Disposable hoods are now available from some suppliers along with bespoke decontaminable belts with a smooth surface that does not compromise comfort. Also look out for the water ingress protection or IP rating to see how waterproof equipment is when showering or in full immersion.

9

Use replacement parts where possible which match the original, e.g. respirator filters, batteries and belts. Not only does this help to keep costs down, but it will also reduce your impact on the environment.



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For more information on how you can better manage your supplies of respiratory equipment in these challenging times, please contact CleanAir UK:

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