

Can Arc Flash PPE be Shared Between Workers?



Introduction

Depending on how often arc flash PPE is used, or where the work is completed, some employers have decided to have their workers share PPE. This includes arc flash suits and face shields, as well as other types of arc flash and shock PPE. Before the Coronavirus, this was an acceptable practice, provided PPE, tools, and equipment were properly cleaned as necessary according to the manufacturers' recommendations.

Now, with the Coronavirus outbreak declared as a pandemic, and the risk of contracting COVID-19 at its highest levels, employers must re-evaluate the sharing of any PPE by their workers. When it comes to arc flash PPE, workers are potentially sharing more than just the tools and equipment they need for the job. They are also sharing an increased risk of contaminating each other.

Sharing vs. Individually Issued

The best way to protect workers from cross contamination is to stop sharing arc flash PPE. Arc flash hoods and face shields are at a high risk due to the proximity of the face shield to the mouth and nose. Every time you exhale, cough, or sneeze your bodily fluids can be secreted onto the interior surface of the shield. Sharing arc flash suits can also be a risk due to improper washing techniques or the ineffectiveness of spray disinfectants on porous (fabric) surfaces. With this in mind, the safest solution is to individually assign all arc flash PPE and to prohibit workers from sharing any PPE that cannot be cleaned and disinfected before each use.



Cleaning vs. Disinfecting

In all situations where PPE, tools and equipment are used by workers, employers must ensure all surfaces that can be touched by workers have been cleaned and disinfected. However, cleaning is not the same as disinfecting. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines cleaning vs. disinfecting as follows:

- Cleaning refers to the removal of germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. Cleaning does not kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.
- Disinfecting refers to using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

The important distinction to be made here is that cleaning your PPE is *not* enough to kill germs and viruses. To protect your workers you must also disinfect it between each use. Please consult Oberon's Storage, Use, Care, and Maintenance document for further instructions on how to properly clean and care for your Arc Flash PPE.



World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) has provided additional guidance on the disinfection of the COVID-19 Virus.

"It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other Coronaviruses. Studies suggest that Coronavirus (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to days. this may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature, or humidity of the environment)."

Summary

Oberon does not recommend sharing of arc flash PPE. This is due to the potential transfer of germs and viruses that cannot be 100% prevented. This is also because there is a lack of concrete evidence for how long COVID-19 or other viruses can remain on surfaces, either porous or non-porous. As more information becomes available on how to effectively disinfect arc flash PPE from a potentially deadly virus, we will update these instructions accordingly. For now, the safest, most effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases is to individually assign arc flash PPE to every worker that will need protection.