



## Economy Impacting Safety?

U.S. Workers Taking Chances With Safety by Not Wearing PPE, According to Survey of Safety Professionals

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U.S. workers are risking workplace injuries by not complying with important safety procedures, according to a survey released by Kimberly-Clark Professional. The survey found that 89 percent of safety professionals polled at the 2008 National Safety Council (NSC) Congress have observed workers failing to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) when they should have been.

"We find it disheartening that people continue to put themselves at risk by failing to wear PPE when undertaking hazardous tasks," said Randy Kates, general manager of the safety business for Kimberly-Clark Professional. "Despite the importance of PPE, there is still an unacceptably high rate of noncompliance in the workplace.

This is the third consecutive year that the Kimberly-Clark survey has revealed a high rate of PPE noncompliance. In 2008, 87 percent of respondents said they had observed PPE noncompliance in the workplace, while 85 percent answered Yes to this question in 2006.

Given the high rate of noncompliance over the past three years, it is not surprising that when asked to name the top workplace safety issue in their facilities one third of respondents cited worker compliance with safety protocols. Next were insufficient management support and/or resources for health and safety functions (27 percent). Under-reporting of workplace injuries and illnesses was third (14 percent), followed by training a multilingual, multicultural workforce (7 percent) and escalating worker compensation costs (5 percent).

### **Is the Economy a Factor?**

One potential explanation for continuing problems with compliance could be the economy. Thirty-four (34) percent of respondents said the economy had affected worker safety training programs or resources; fifty-nine (59) percent said it had not. Of those who said the economy had impacted safety training or resources, the survey found that:

- 63 percent said it had led to less money for education and training.
- 42 percent said it had resulted in reduced personnel to handle safety training tasks.

- 33 percent said the faltering economy had led to business concerns taking precedence over safety concerns.

This year's survey also polled safety professionals about the steps they have taken or intend to take to encourage greater PPE compliance. The top response was "improving existing education and training programs," followed by "purchasing more comfortable PPE." Increased monitoring of employees was third, followed by tying compliance to individual performance evaluations and purchasing more stylish PPE.

"Work-related injuries in the U.S. cost more than \$50 billion a year,"\* said Kates. "Our research has shown that comfort and style are major drivers for compliance with PPE protocols. In the current economic climate it is more important than ever to invest in PPE that workers will want to wear."

This year respondents were asked to describe their personal safety philosophy from a list of choices. Two responses tied for first place: "Safety doesn't cost, it pays" and "Organizations must create safety based cultures" (43 percent each). Only 10 percent selected the statement "Safety begins and ends at the top", and just 2 percent chose "Safety is a pain, but so is my boss."

"These results did not surprise us," said Scott Gaddis, global safety leader for Kimberly-Clark Professional. "Workplace safety must be managed like every other strategic business objective that is important to an organization's success."

*Survey Methodology: The survey was undertaken at the National Safety Council (NSC) Congress in Anaheim, California, on September 23, 2008. The survey questionnaires were filled out by 153 safety professionals who reported being responsible for purchasing, selecting, or influencing the purchase or selection of, or compliance with, PPE. The respondents included safety directors and managers, industrial hygienists, environmental managers, and purchasing professionals. For full survey results, visit [www.kcprofessional.com/us/mkt/2008nscpressrelease/NSC\\_08\\_Survey\\_FINAL.PD...](http://www.kcprofessional.com/us/mkt/2008nscpressrelease/NSC_08_Survey_FINAL.PD...) Source: Kimberly-Clark Professional. [www.kcprofessional.com](http://www.kcprofessional.com). Endnote: \* Source: Liberty Mutual.*