



women's engineering society

PPE Survey Results 2024



www.wes.org.uk

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Analysis was undertaken by independent organisation, Rocket Science



1,500 submissions
between August 2023 to January 2024

About WES



Our Vision

An engineering industry that employs the diversity of the society it serves, to solve the biggest societal issues of our time.



Our Mission

To support women in engineering to fulfil their potential and support the engineering industry to be inclusive.



Our Values

Every employee and volunteer is a custodian of our history, and a contributor to our future. We're collaborative, empowered, and inclusive.

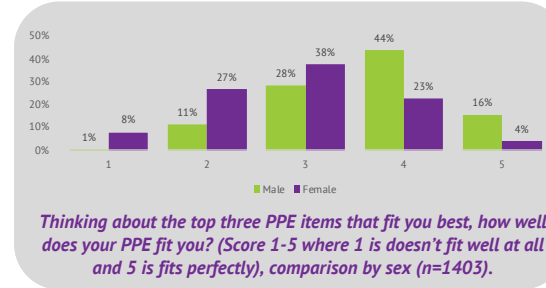


Our Focus

- Supporting women in engineering at every stage of their career with skills and career development through webinars, collaboration with professional bodies, partner programmes, and mentoring and job opportunities
- Supporting businesses and institutions to attract and retain women in engineering by providing access to a network of talent for recruitment and raising business profiles through equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) collaboration
- Shaping the engineering gender diversity debate in industry and with government via the Woman Engineer Journal, collaborating in EDI in engineering research, and shaping campaigns to build an inclusive and diverse engineering community
- Driving innovation on sustainability in engineering through gender diversity and delivering environmental sustainability as an organisation.

PPE simply does not fit

Women lack access to fit-for-purpose PPE across different sectors



42% report having to make modifications to their PPE as a result of poor fit.



The top items causing challenges for women are jackets, headwear, gloves and shoes

Women receive negative and degrading comments from male colleagues

"I don't like when they make the women's PPE pink. People on site make fun of you."



61% of Pregnant women were not provided with PPE or had to provide their own



Women do not have access to fit-for-purpose PPE throughout pregnancy, periods and menopause



"I find the material too hot and not breathable and it is difficult to control hot flushes. I end up feeling wet through."

Women face tripping hazards, restricted movement and unsafe working conditions because of ill fitting PPE



Women find PPE uncomfortable or very uncomfortable, and this affects their work negatively



"Safety shoes are so bulky that it is painful and impossible to move on site"



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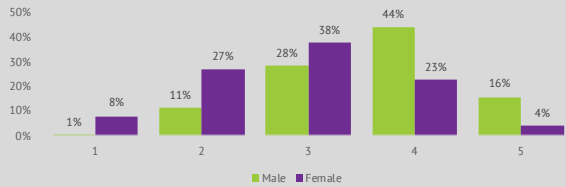


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What we found

The data analysis is based on a survey that represents a substantial consultation of the female workforce in engineering, collating just under 1,500 responses



Thinking about the top three PPE items that fit you best, how well does your PPE fit you? (Score 1-5 where 1 is doesn't fit well at all and 5 is fits perfectly), comparison by sex (n=1403).

Most worn PPE among women were boots (71%), gloves (68%), hard hats (60%) and safety glasses (59%) However, even these items are moderately restrictive

27% of women vs 60% of men have comfortable or perfect fitting PPE

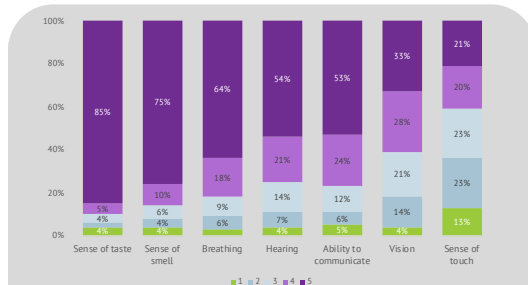


"I avoid going on site as much as I should as I look and feel stupid."

More than a 1/3 found equipment restrictive even if comfortable

24% of respondents said PPE restricts their movement.

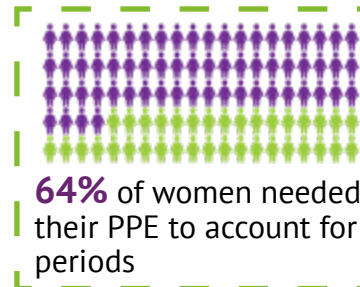
With sense of touch (36%), vision (18%), ability to communicate (11%) and hearing (11%) being the most restricted



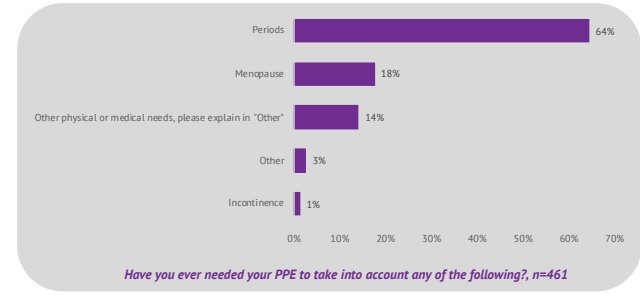
Thinking about PPE items for your face/head/hands/chest, how much does your PPE restrict your [sense] at work? Score 1-5 where 1 is very restricting and 5 is not at all



53% of respondents from under-represented ethnicities have made alterations to their PPE, much higher than other groups



64% of women needed their PPE to account for periods



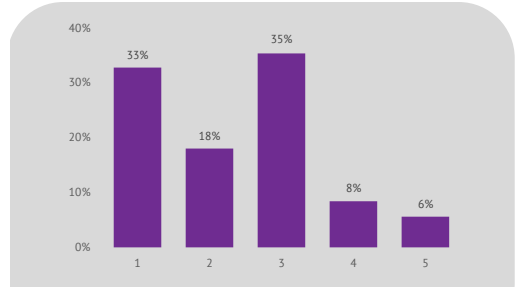
Have you ever needed your PPE to take into account any of the following?, n=461



51% found their maternity PPE very or somewhat uncomfortable

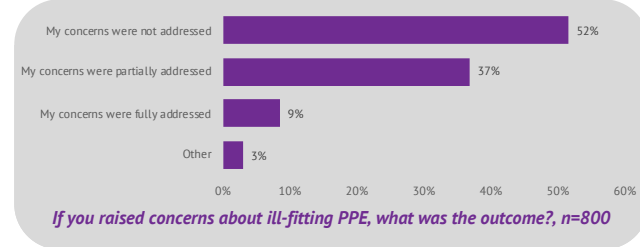
Climbing harnesses, lifejackets, or air systems they use do not work for women's bodies increasing risk to life in their jobs.

42% noted that the maternity PPE provided affected their ability to continue in their role



Thinking about maternity PPE, how comfortable was your PPE? (Score 1-5 where 1 is very uncomfortable and 5 is very comfortable), n=144

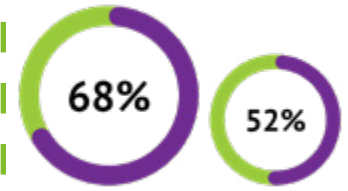
42%



If you raised concerns about ill-fitting PPE, what was the outcome?, n=800

No provision for plus-size, petite or tall women

"My employer called me 'challenging' when I requested an appropriate respirator and fit test, for a lead acid battery plant. I was loaned a positive pressure respirator to 'shut her up'."

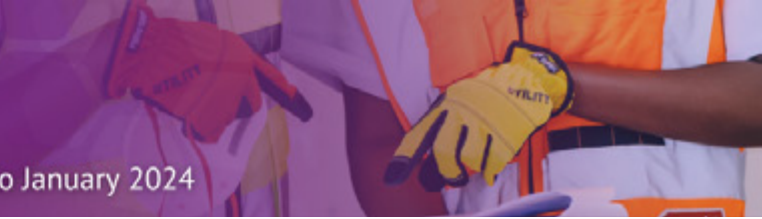


68% of women have raised concerns

More than half (52%) of concerns were not addressed



Inconsistent sizing compared with the high street.



Why has nothing changed?

Reasons behind the lack of change



Women's PPE is seen as a women's issue and not a health and safety concern for employers and policy makers



Societal stigma around periods, pregnancy and menopause



Women perceived as a minority in workplaces who need PPE, and therefore are not seen as a priority



“Older, male, co-workers considered it funny my PPE didn't fit.”

“I was told I didn't need new PPE & only wanted to look good in selfies.”

Consequences of the lack of change



“My shoes, are twice as expensive, and my soles are expensive too. The gloves I use are 6 times more expensive than those my male colleagues use.”



Women are put at risk by the equipment meant to prevent harm



Women are underrepresented in professions needing PPE and are leaving the workforce as a result



Women are exposed to sexist and misogynistic comments in the workplace

What Next?

Our research highlights little has changed for women in the past 15 years. The extent of the problem and the challenges it causes means **WES will:**

Conduct

a nation-wide survey of women's measurements

Convene

a steering group of women to oversee this process

Coordinate

with PPE producers & suppliers to ensure they account for our findings

Engage

with employers to highlight the importance of fit-for-purpose PPE

Lobby

for access to fit-for-purpose PPE as a right within employment legislation



Want to be measured? Want to join the steering group?

Email WES at ppe@wes.org.uk to let us know.

Read the full report at www.wes.org.uk/ppe



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