The Power of Protective Clothing: Dressing for Safety Success

You've heard of the "power tie" and the "power suit" as the keys to dressing for success in business. However the real power lies in the protective clothing arena, where employees in industry and manufacturing deal with molten iron, hot oil, sparks, caustic cleaning materials or hot steel rods on a daily basis. These employees need clothing that will protect them under truly tough conditions. Not an easy request. But, safety professional's today work hard to protect their employees by providing a full array of clothing designed to keep them safe, comfortable and productive.

At a major manufacturer of steel for the automotive industry, workers wear an assortment of gear to protect them from head to toe. "Our employees are working with molten iron and steel," explains Keith Goodson, safety & health engineer. "We have them decked out in full regalia - 'greens' (flame resistant cloth clothing), 'silvers' (clothing with aluminized outer layer), leggings, face shields and Kevlar hand protection - to guard against any spills." During maintenance procedures, workers need to be protected from sparks. "That's where we use leather cape sleeves as well as hoods and goggles. We also use leather hand protection in the areas with finished product to protect workers from sharp edges of steel."

Many Needs; Many Solutions

Scott Greeley of another leading steel mill uses a variety of protective clothing for his workers. They manufacture steel farm fence posts from used railroad rails and safety is the utmost concern. "We have some unique problems here," explains Greeley, director of safety. "Because we're working with hot bars of steel, we need to protect workers in a number of different ways. For example, workers wear a knee to ankle shin guard that has a semi-hard backing. If a bar accidentally touches against their legs, they're protected from serious burns.

Another problem that safety professionals face is keeping workers comfortable yet still protected. Greeley explains, "Our workers are hoisting eight-pound fence posts two at a time to hang on an overhead rack. We need to protect them in case any posts fall down." But it's also hot in the facility, so Greeley talked to his Magid rep about different clothing options for keeping workers safe but comfortable. "Magid came up with a half jacket that covers the arms and tops of the shoulders," he says. "That's where we need the protection - from overhead. Magid has been a great help to us in finding solutions. They're always suggesting new things that are more cost-effective. That's a true partnership."

Frank Pollak, stores and environmental coordinator for a manufacturer of structural components for automobiles facility, depends on his Magid rep to offer creative alternatives as well. At this company, most of the work involves stamping or assembly. "We need a variety of equipment choices to protect our welders," he says. "They wear denim aprons for leaning against presses, full and half jackets to protect against sparks and heat, and flame retardant skullcaps to keep hair from being singed."
Protective Clothing Bats Clean-Up

A leading manufacturer of wheels for the agricultural and construction industries as well as the military, believes that it isn't just grinders and welders who need serious protective clothing. Dan Waller, purchasing manager notes, "The workers who wash the wheels wear rubber aprons to protect them from the cleaning chemicals. It is a fairly potent formula that cleans grease off wheels, and the rubber aprons keep them dry and protected."

Some companies require their workers to be protected from the chemicals used in the cleaning process. At a manufacturer of a wide variety of aluminum livestock and horse trailers, car haulers and race car transporters, the cleaning process is fairly rugged. "After the trailers are assembled they are washed to clean off the weld smoke and other debris from the manufacturing process," explains John Krandle, supervisor. "Acid is sprayed on the trailers and water is used to wash it off. Workers wear general purpose PVC knee boots and nitrile gloves for full protection, and they wear acid suits to keep acid off the skin." The "acid suit" is actually a PVC/polyester knit green jacket and pants combination. Both jacket and pants are coated on two sides, making them caustic and chemical resistant as well as flame retardant.

The major steel mill uses Magid's own brand of a Tyvek coverall alternate for maintenance duties at their steel mill. "That's another advantage of using Magid," explains Beth Wilkins, senior buyer. "Because they are a manufacturer, they can produce and sell many items at prices far below the competitors. Their polypropylene suit does a great job for maintenance duties at a very reasonable price." By using Magid's alternate product, our company can reduce the cost of this particular suit by 65% over the Tyvek® brand name product.

Cost-Effective Protection

Whatever the clothing need, these safety professionals have found that they can keep their workers safe and comfortable yet still remain cost-effective. Pollak at the automotive manufacturer credits his Magid rep with being able to meet his company's safety needs without sacrificing quality. "Their prices are competitive, the quality is good and the service is outstanding," he says.

Beth Wilkins, senior buyer for the steel mill says they recently consolidated safety supply purchases in a cost-saving effort. "We decided on one-stop shopping for a number of reasons," explains Wilkins. "We wanted to reduce our vendor base, consolidate and standardize products and reduce the number of special orders." To begin this process, a Safety Commodity Management Team was established. This committee of safety professionals representing four of the steel facilities joined Wilkins for Corporate Purchasing's objective to implement this new program on commodity management. Their first assignment was to evaluate suppliers.

The Safety Commodity Management Team looked at each company very closely, evaluating every aspect of the business, including pricing, service, order processing, warehousing facilities and accounting practices. They also visited each company's facilities to see their operations first hand. The team chose Magid as their supplier. "They came out ahead of the rest," says Wilkins. "We were very impressed with their pricing and service. For example, we're saving 8% on the flame-retardant sateen 'greens' that we purchase for all our facilities. Magid's low prices and our single-source approach have meant significant cost reductions for our company." The team meets monthly to oversee safety supply purchases, and are joined by a Magid representative every two or three months. "Our team is committed to getting the best prices without compromising safety," says Wilkins. "Magid is a partner with us in making that happen."
All of the safety professionals featured here agree that you need tough clothing to protect workers from hot oil, molten iron, flying sparks and other hazards in the steel and heavy manufacturing industries. They also agree that it takes a supplier with the right combination of pricing, service and quality to meet their needs effectively. Waller of the wheel manufacturer explains, "We depend on our Magid rep to help us keep our costs down. Magid is always looking for different products that will do the job for us at a lower price. It's a partnership."