



EQUITY IN SAFETY

**A Global Report
on Women's
Access to Proper
Personal Protection
Equipment**

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SUMMARY

It is well established that, on average, women's bodies differ from men's bodies and thus require Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) designed with their anthropometric measurements in mind (Halim, A., & Johnson, M., 2020). The challenge of women accessing properly fitting PPE is a persistent concern that has garnered increasing attention in recent years (McCullough, J., & Smith, A., 2021). Despite the growing number of women entering industries such as construction, manufacturing, and mining, many still face significant barriers in finding PPE designed for their bodies (Haines, V., & Smith, C., 2022). This lack of access not only compromises their safety but also highlights a broader equity gap in the workplace.

The authors of this report conducted a global survey in conjunction with an April 2024 social media campaign entitled #MyBodyMyPPE, aimed at gathering comprehensive data on the challenges women face in obtaining appropriate PPE. (MyBodyMyPPESurvey, 2024) This survey, sought to gain insights to inform proactive solutions and help organizations and employers close the equity gap, ultimately improving safety on job sites around the world.

The survey engaged 505 women from a diverse range of industries. The majority of responses came from the Construction (33.5%), Manufacturing (12.3%), and Mining (7.5%) sectors, where the issue of inadequate PPE is particularly acute. The survey's geographic reach was wide, including primarily English-speaking countries, with the most participation from the United States (62.2%), followed by Canada (12.9%), the United Kingdom (10.9%), and Australia (9.1%). The age distribution of respondents was also broad, with 60.2% of participants between the ages of 25 and 44 years old.

The data gathered through this survey provides valuable insight into the widespread issue of improper PPE for women. These findings are crucial for driving change and ensuring that all workers, regardless of gender, have access to the protective equipment they need to perform their jobs safely. This report highlights the urgency of addressing the PPE equity gap for women in industry and offers recommendations for organizations and employers to develop and implement solutions that prioritize safety and equity in the workplace.



MY BODY MY PPE SURVEY

Thank you for taking part in this confidential survey focused on gathering insights about women's experiences regarding the availability, fit, and accessibility of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the workplace.

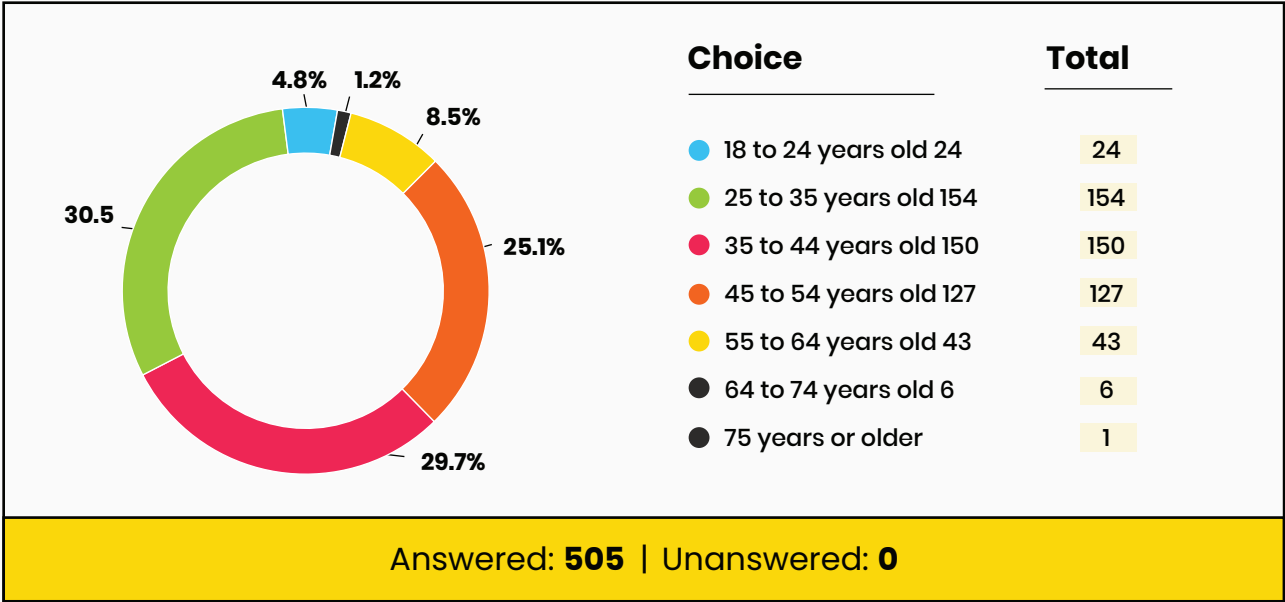
Your input is crucial for understanding the current situation and identifying areas for improvement in women's workplace safety.

We aim to explore your perspectives on the sizing, comfort, and availability of PPE specifically designed for women. Your honest responses will contribute to creating a safer and more inclusive work environment. Participation is voluntary, and your responses will remain confidential.

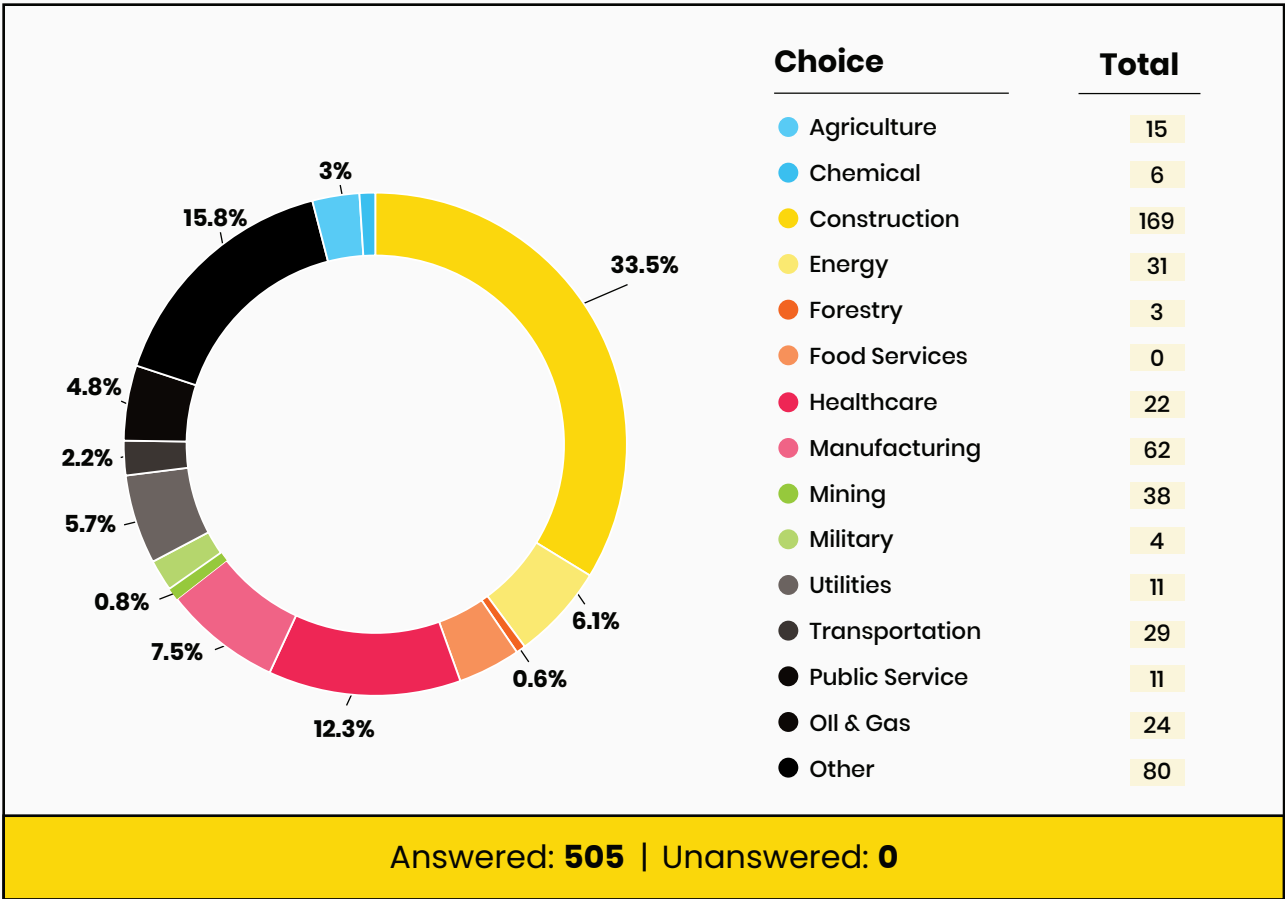
Thank you!

SURVEY RESULTS:

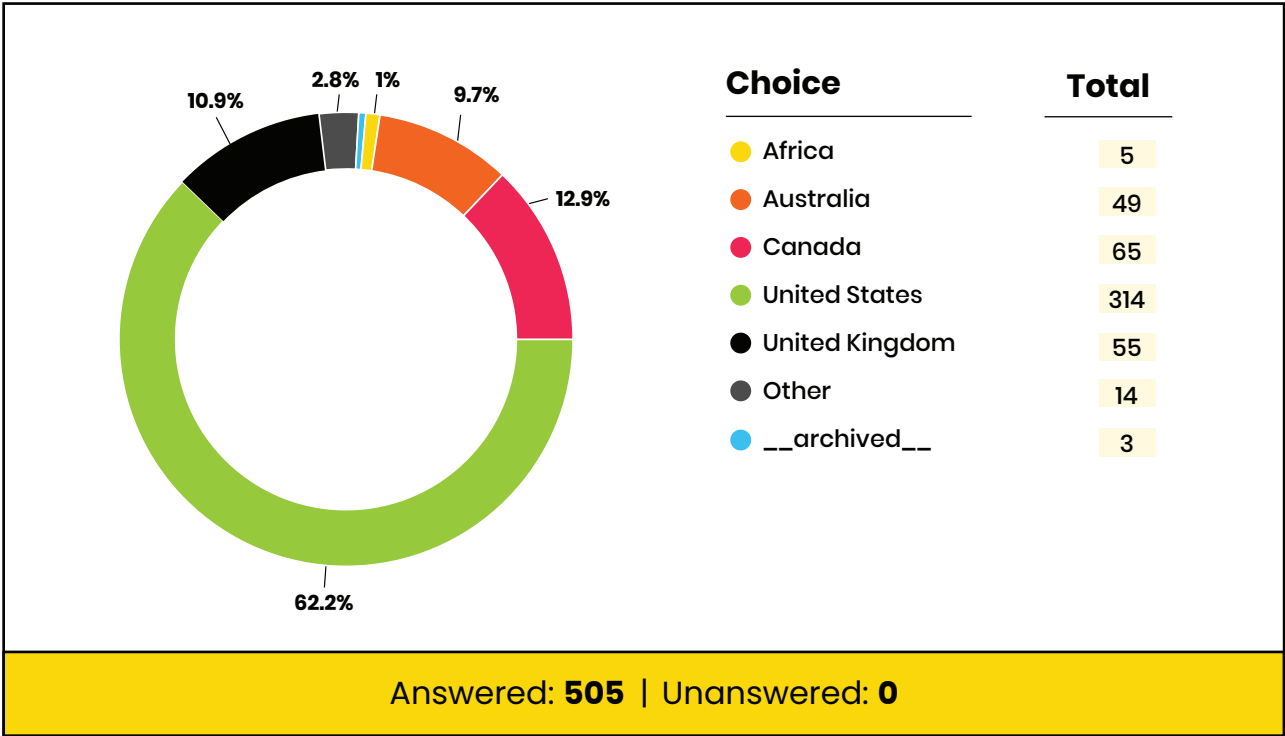
Q 1. What is your age?



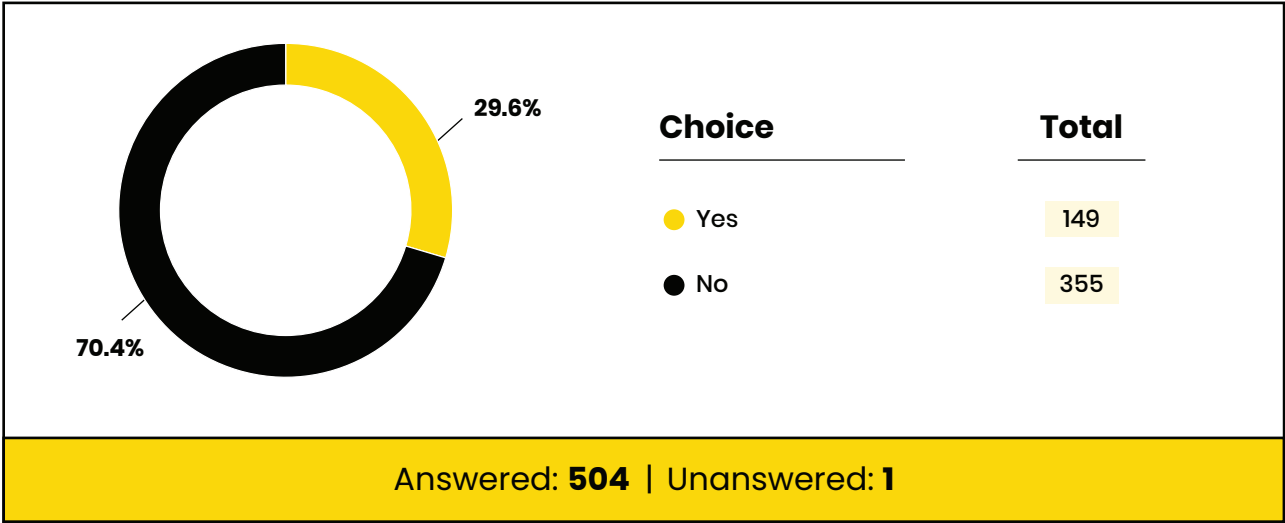
Q 2. What industry do you work in?



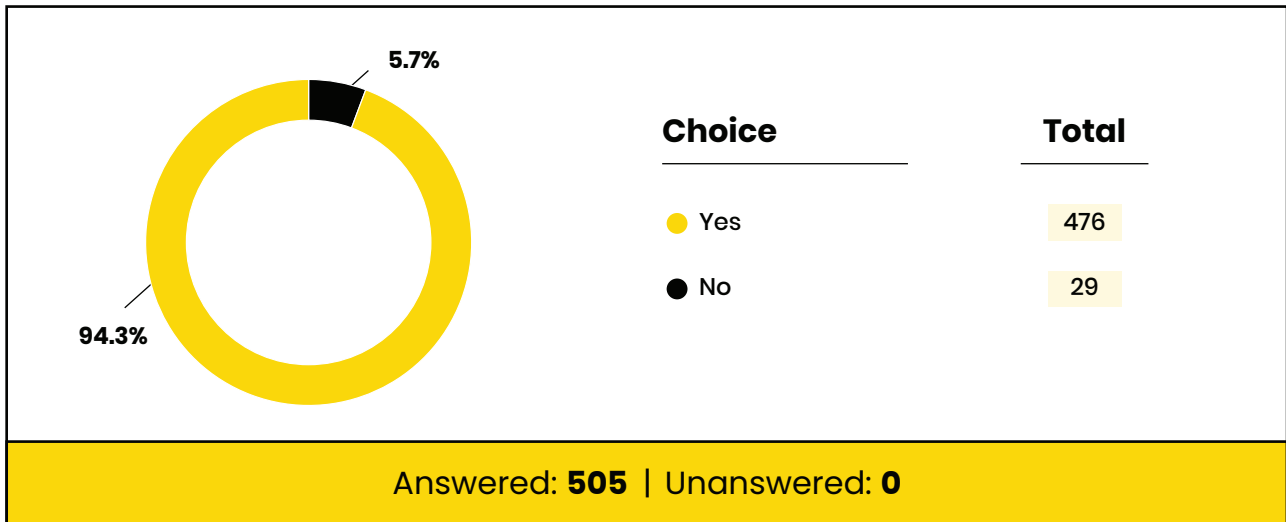
Q 3. Which country do you work in?



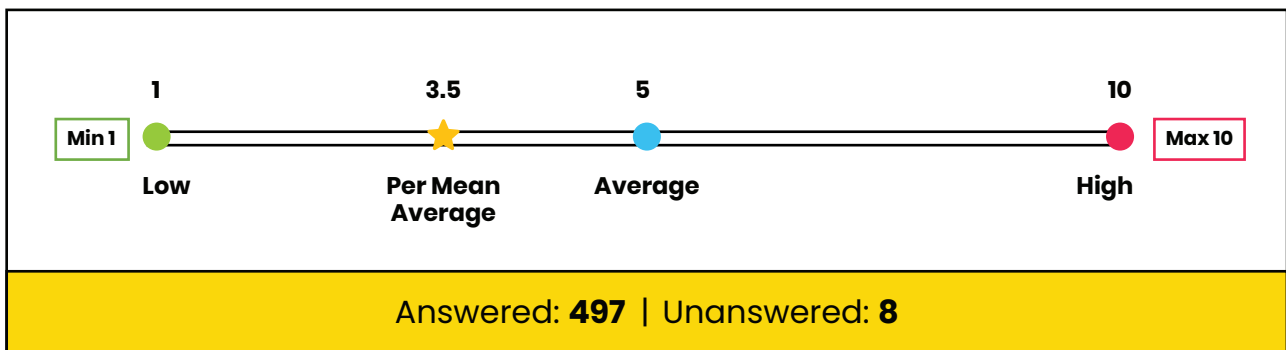
Q 4. Do you have access to female specific PPE in your workplace?



Q 5. Have you ever experienced challenges finding PPE that fits you properly in terms of size and comfort?



Q 6. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the accessibility of PPE options tailored for women in your workplace?

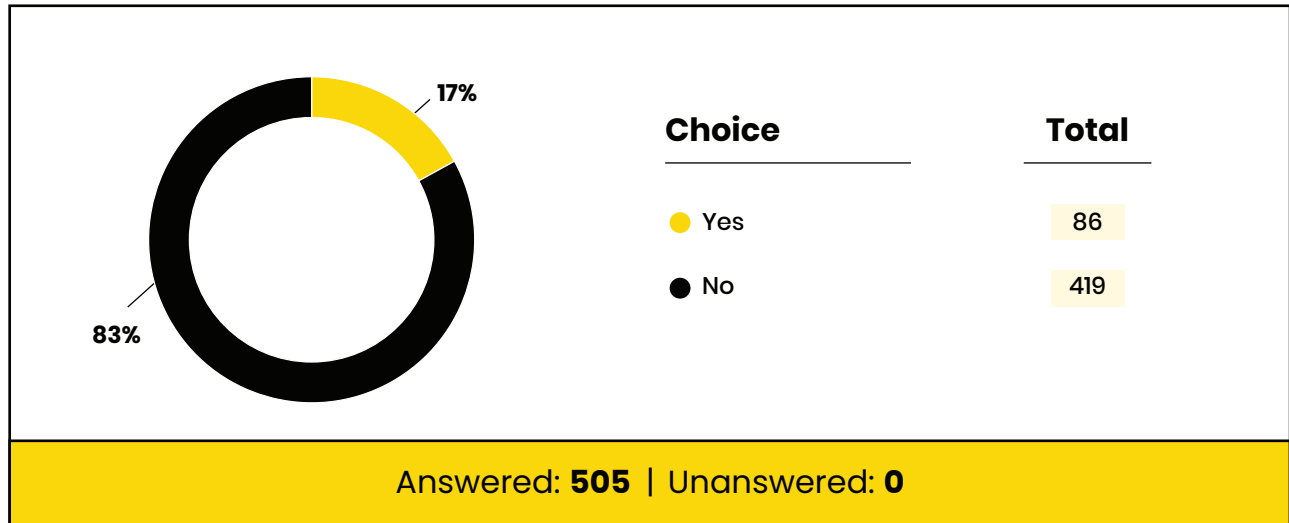


“ An inclusive PPE program is critical for reducing workplace injuries.

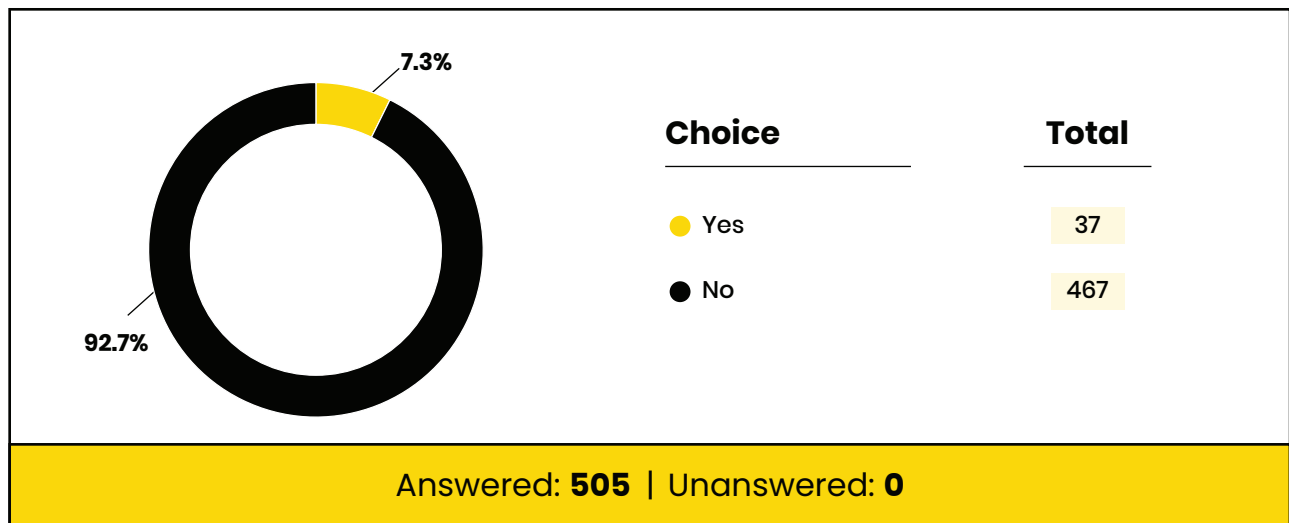
– Emily Soloby

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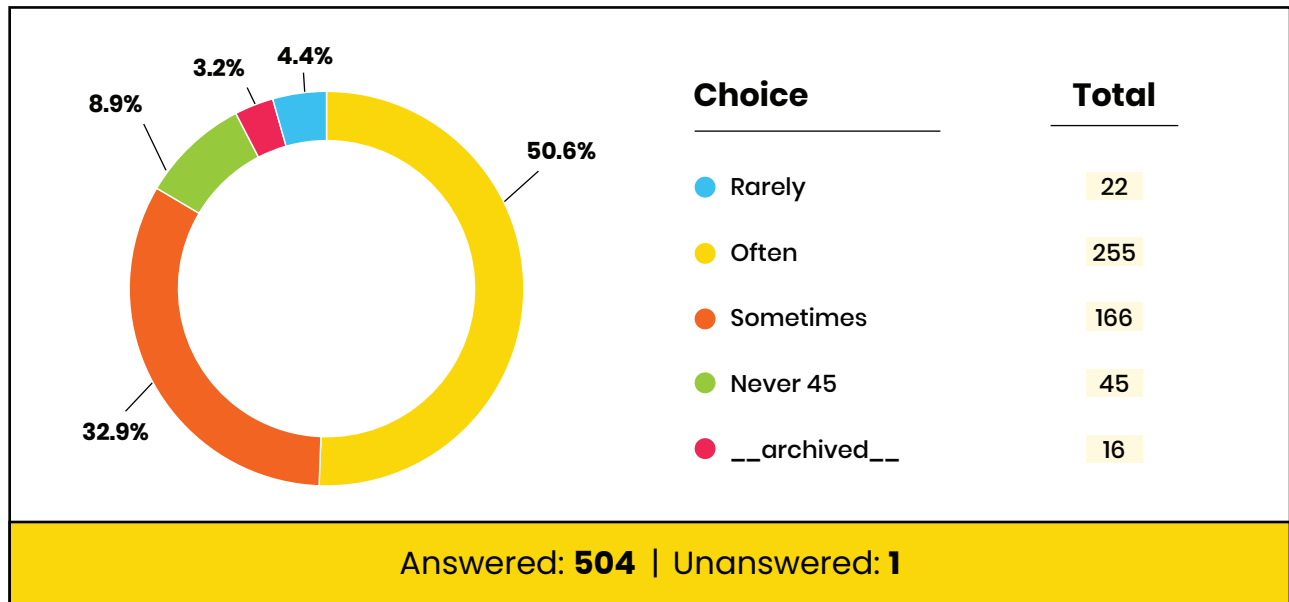
Q 7. Are you aware of any workplace policies or initiatives aimed at addressing the unique sizing and fit requirements of women when it comes to PPE?



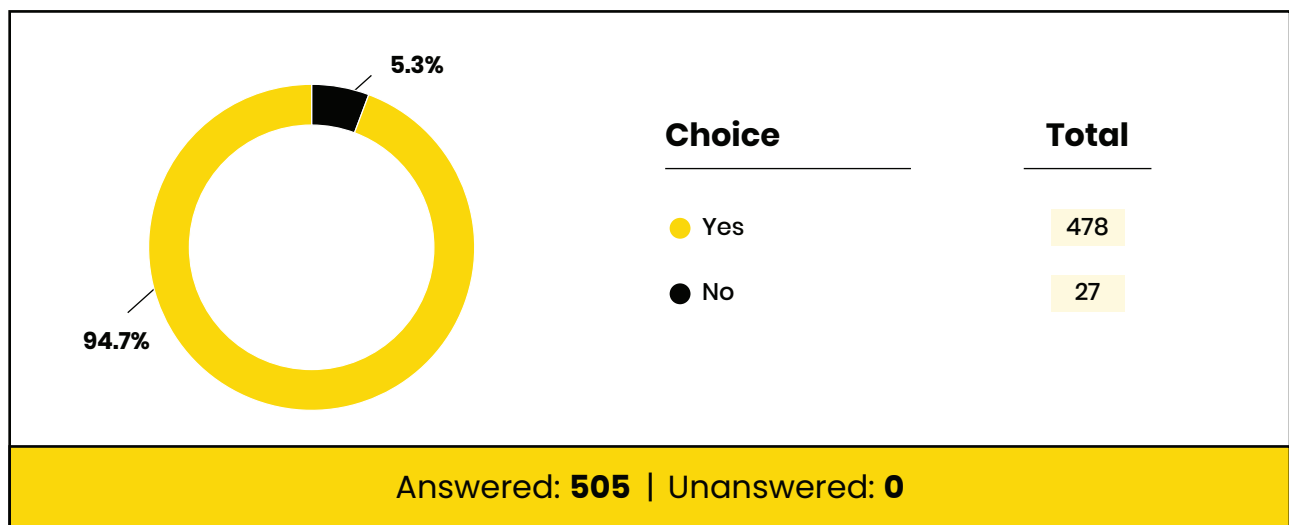
Q 8. Do you believe that the current range of PPE options for women is diverse enough to accommodate various body shapes and sizes?



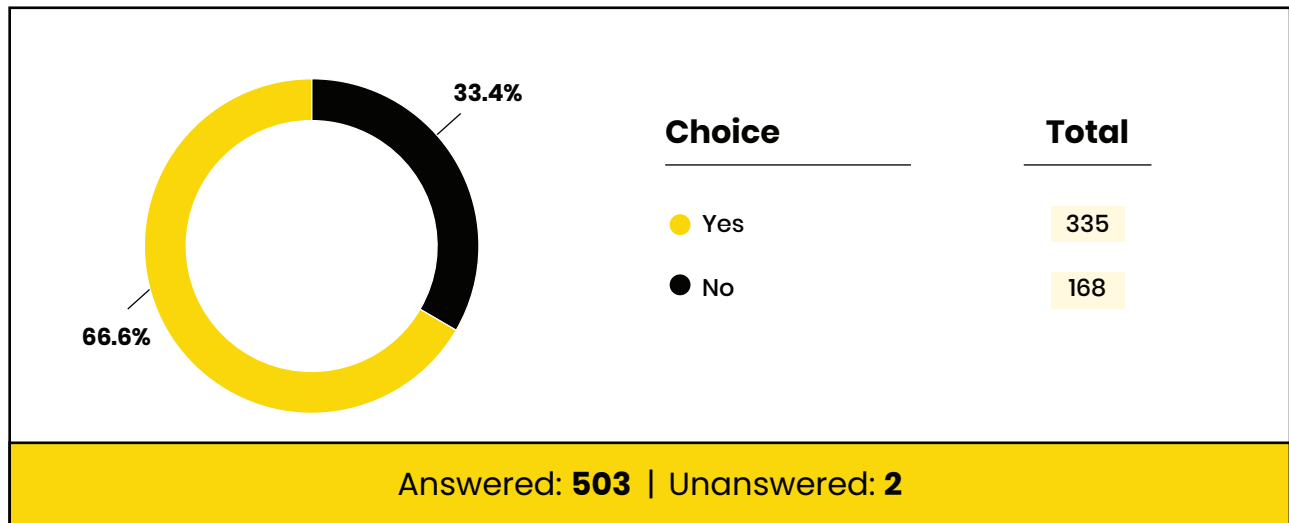
Q 9. Have you ever had to modify or adjust standard-issue PPE to better fit your body, and if so, how often?



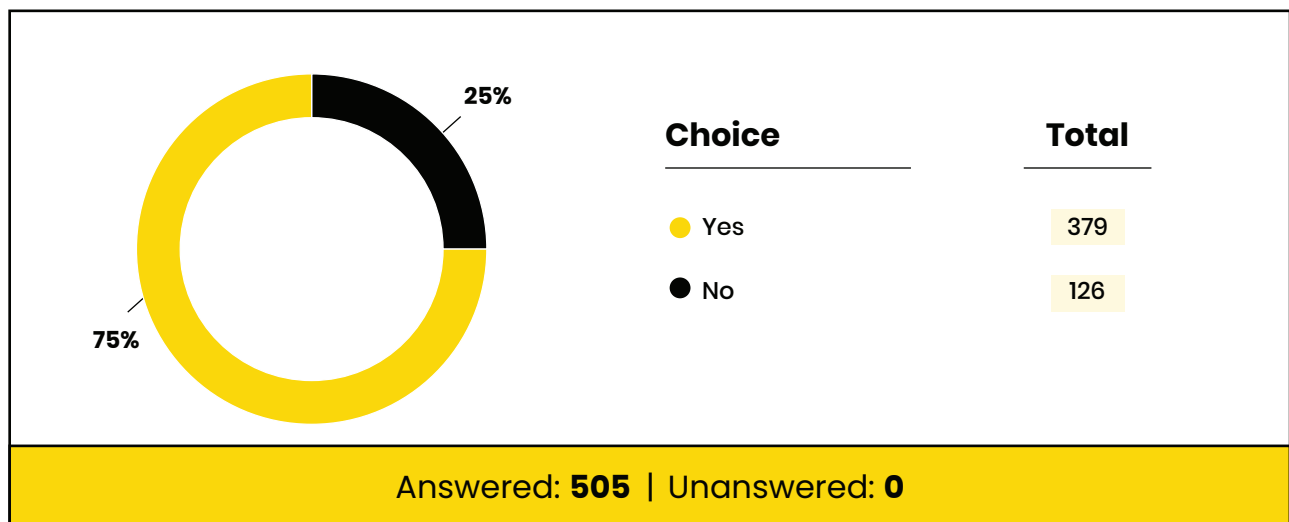
Q 10. In your opinion, is it the employer's responsibility to provide a variety of PPE sizes specifically designed for women?



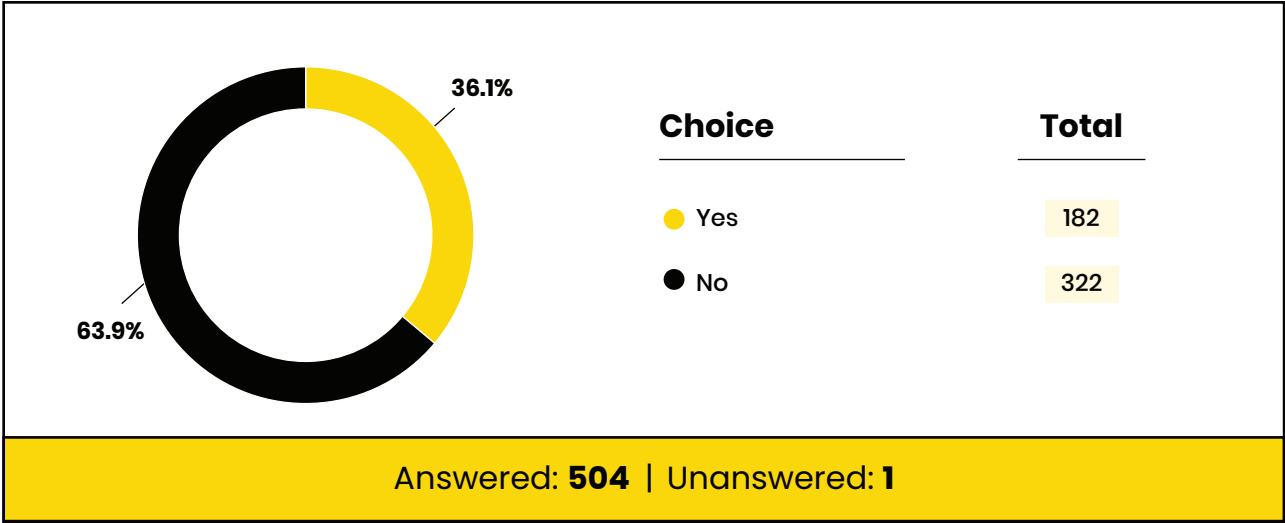
Q 11. Have you ever encountered situations where the lack of properly fitting PPE hindered your ability to perform your job safely?



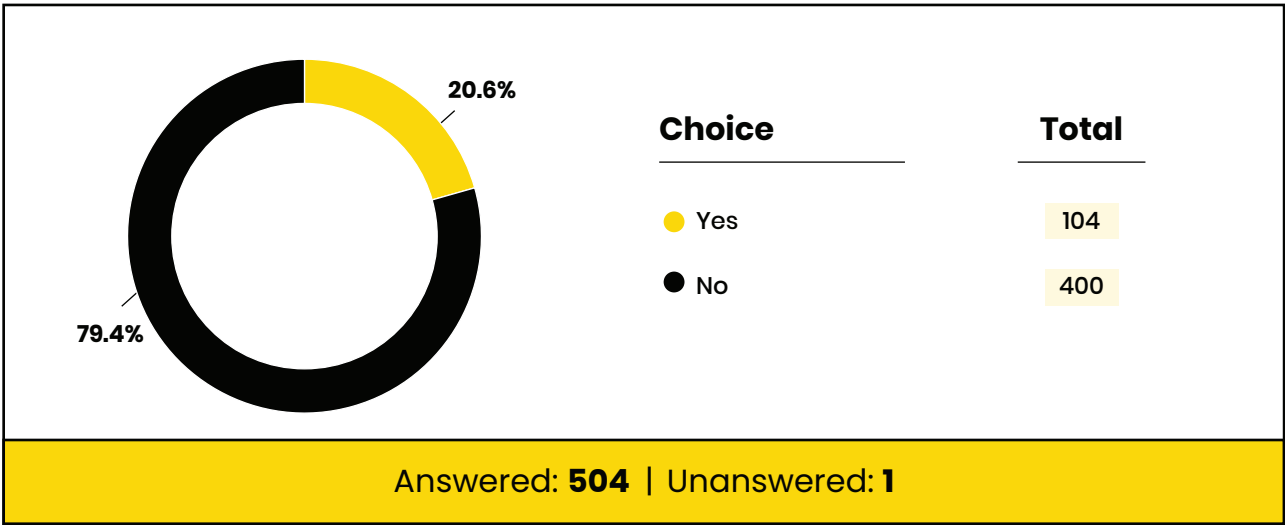
Q 12. Are you comfortable communicating your PPE size and fit preferences to your employer or supervisor?



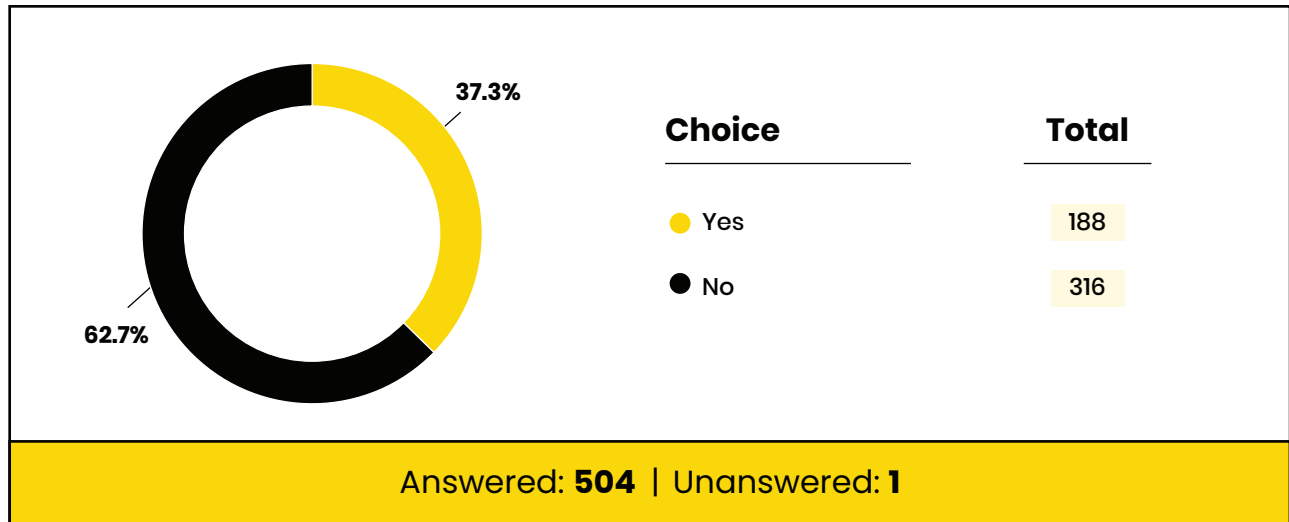
Q 13. Does your employer’s commitment to proper PPE factor into your overall decision for employment with them?



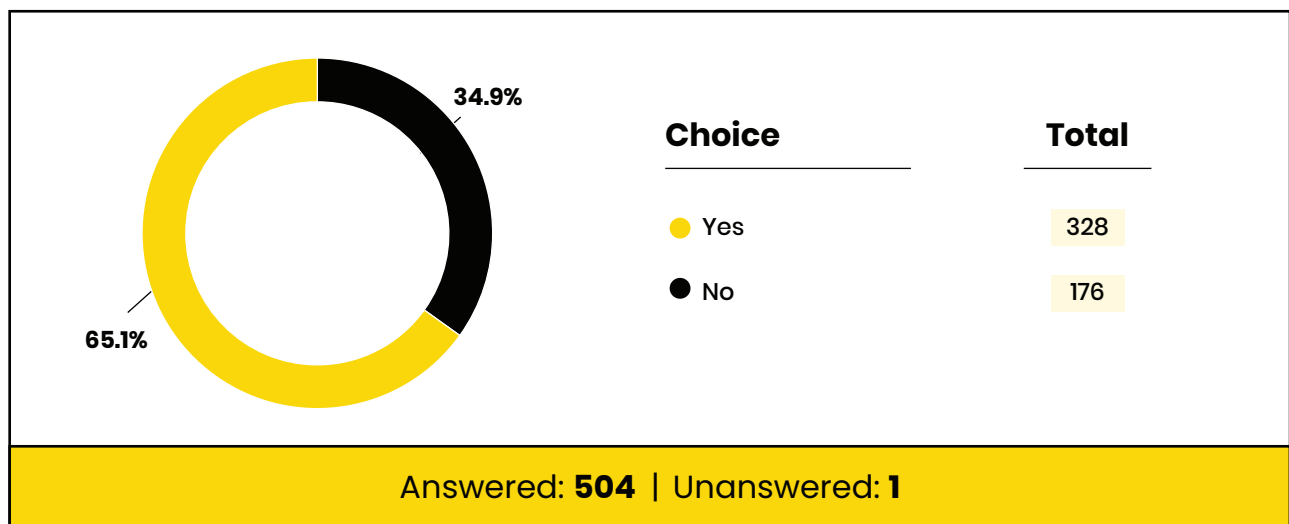
Q 14. Have you personally experienced a situation where ill-fitting PPE caused an injury?



Q 15. Have you personally experienced a near miss where wearing ill-fitting PPE was the cause?



Q 16. Have you ever encountered a situation where the lack of properly fitting PPE hindered your ability to perform your job effectively?



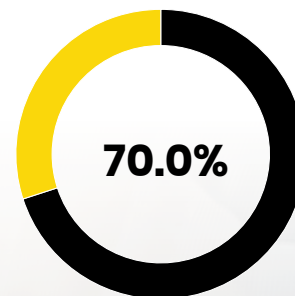
INTRODUCTION

The survey data highlight a critical and ongoing issue: There is a lack of access to properly fitting Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for women across various industries. The overwhelming majority of respondents identified significant challenges in finding PPE that fits correctly, with serious implications for safety and job performance.

ANALYSIS

1 Gender Disparities in PPE Access

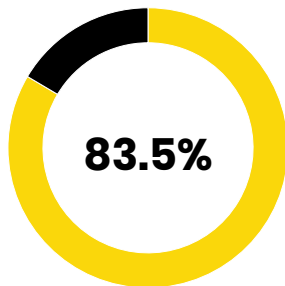
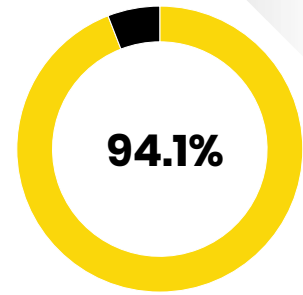
In the survey responses, 70.0% of women reported not having access to female-specific PPE in their workplaces. This reveals a substantial gap in the provision of safety gear tailored to women's needs. This lack of female-specific PPE could be due to several factors. It may be that safety directors and others in charge of PPE in the workplace are unaware of the need and are not providing it due to a lack of knowledge about the issue. Alternatively, they may be aware of the need but choose not to provide it due to cost, inconvenience, or other reasons. Finally, it could be that workplaces are aware of the need but have been unable to find properly fitting PPE for women. Regardless of the reason, the result is the same: women are being put at risk.



2 Widespread Issues with PPE Fit

A staggering 94.1% of respondents stated that they have struggled with ill-fitting PPE. Ill-fitting PPE can lead to several problems. In some cases, individuals may choose to wear it despite the poor fit, which can lower morale, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging in the workplace. (Wellbeing, 2024).

Ill-fitting PPE can also cause physical discomfort, distraction, and even fear of injury. (Brisbine, B.R. et al 2022). It follows then, that many people may choose not to wear PPE at all if it does not fit, and instead would choose to prioritize their perceived safety and comfort. Those who do not wear PPE are not protected, thus increasing their safety risk.



Additionally, 83.5% of respondents reported that they had to modify their ill-fitting PPE “often” or “sometimes.” Modification is a common but dangerous solution because altered PPE may no longer meet OSHA standards. (Dodoo, J.E., Al-Samarraie, H., 2019). This creates a no-win situation where women must choose between wearing unsafe PPE or no PPE at all.

3 Safety Concerns and Workplace Risk

Ill-fitting PPE has clearly led to injuries and near-misses, with 20.3% of respondents reporting injuries and 36.9% experiencing near-misses due to improper PPE. This underscores the urgent need for better PPE tailored to women. Workplace injuries should be avoided to ensure worker well-being and safety. Injuries can also reduce overall morale and employee retention. Moreover, productivity and financial health of the company is at stake.

4 Worker Effectiveness and Productivity

Many respondents reported that poorly fitting PPE has hindered their ability to perform their jobs safely and effectively, with over 65% stating that the lack of proper PPE has directly impacted their work. This is concerning for several reasons. Ill-fitting PPE not only endangers workers but also affects productivity and the financial bottom line of organizations. Any perceived savings from not purchasing women’s PPE should be considered in conjunction with any resultant decrease in worker productivity.

5 Employer Responsibility and Awareness

Survey results show a strong consensus (94.7%) that it is the employer's responsibility to provide a range of PPE sizes designed specifically for women. This statistic highlights a disconnect between workers' safety expectations and companies' willingness or understanding to meet those expectations. Despite nearly 95% of respondents believing employers should be responsible for providing well-fitting PPE for women, only 17 % were aware of any such initiatives in their workplaces. The absence of such initiatives in many workplaces (83% of respondents were unaware of such policies) indicates a significant oversight in current safety practices.

Interestingly, the survey reveals that an employer providing proper PPE does not significantly affect women's decision to work there (Only 36.1% of women stated that it would influence their decision). This should not be interpreted as an invitation to ignore women's PPE needs. With 83% of women not encountering women's PPE initiatives, it is clear there are very few women's PPE-friendly workplaces. Women are thus left with little choice but to risk their safety to gainful employment and career advancement.

Employers should also note that on January 13, 2025, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration finalized a rule requiring all construction workers to have properly fitting PPE. This rule is an excellent step in the right direction that should be extended to all industries.

Recommendations

To address these critical gaps in women's workplace safety, the following recommendations are proposed for organizations and employers:

1 Implement Gender-Specific PPE Policies:

Organizations should develop and enforce policies ensuring the availability of PPE specifically designed for women. This includes conducting regular assessments to identify gaps and updating PPE offerings accordingly.

2 Request Women-Focused Brands from Distributors:

Companies sourcing PPE from distributors should request that female-specific PPE brands be carried, including those from small women-owned brands.

3 Add to Your Vendor List:

Companies should include suppliers capable of offering head-to-toe female-specific PPE to their approved vendor list. This is crucial for advancing the availability of women's PPE.

4 Utilize Women-Owned and Focused PPE Companies:

Companies should prioritize manufacturers committed to providing safety options specifically for women and those that focus on proper anthropometric measurements for women's PPE.

5 Reject the Notion of “Unisex” PPE:

Companies should reject “unisex” PPE, recognizing that such products are often designed based on male measurements and lack the nuance required to fit both men and women correctly.

6 Reject “Pink It and Shrink It” PPE:

PPE that is simply colored pink or altered in appearance without changes to the measurements should be rejected as unacceptable.

7 Collaborate with Manufacturers:

Employers should collaborate with women's PPE manufacturers on research and development to expand the variety of options available, ensuring they accommodate a diverse range of body shapes and sizes.

8 Establish Feedback Mechanisms:

Companies should regularly solicit feedback from employees on PPE fit and comfort and make necessary adjustments. This feedback should be integrated into ongoing safety audits and risk management processes for continuous improvement.



CONCLUSION

By considering these recommendations, organizations can significantly improve the safety, comfort, and overall job satisfaction of female workers. Addressing disparities in PPE accessibility is not only a matter of safety but also of equity and is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This survey and the resulting report would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of several dedicated individuals and organizations. We extend our gratitude to the founders of the #MyBodyMyPPE campaign:

- » **Amy Roosa**, Founder of The Safety Rack (www.thesafetyrack.org), a non-profit committed to closing the personal protection equipment equity gap in women across all industries through education, research, and advocacy.
- » **Emily Soloby**, CEO and Founder of Juno Jones Safety Boots (www.junojones.com), and Founding Member and Board Member of the Alliance of Women's Safety Apparel Manufacturers (AWSAM), who has been instrumental in advocating for better PPE solutions for women and creating more options for properly fitting safety footwear.
- » **Della Ray**, Welding PPE expert at The Safety Rack and Chapter President of NAWIC, whose expertise in PPE and advocacy for women in trades has been vital to this initiative.

We also wish to express our sincere thanks to the Alliance of Women's Safety Apparel Manufacturers (AWSAM) (www.awsam.org). Their support in crafting and promoting the survey reflects their mission to elevate women in the workplace and ensure they receive the appropriate protection needed on the job.

Organizations such as The Safety Rack and AWSAM are a resource for learning about women's PPE brands, and for companies interested in collaborating with brands to create better fitting PPE for their workers.

A very special thank you goes to the team who wrote, edited, and reviewed this report:

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|---------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| » Amy Roosa | » Sally Morse | » Dr. I. David Daniels |
| » Emily Soloby | » Melanie Adams | » Jessie Moffitt |
| » Della Ray | » Christy Maes | » Abby Ferri |
| » Ananya Srusty | » Lisa Hutson | » Sasha Reed |
| » Renee T. Bavineau | » Natasha Ozybko | » Hemlata Sarma |

Your dedication and expertise in advising on this report have been crucial in bringing this important work to fruition.

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The need for properly fitting women's ppe isn't a fashion statement - we actually need these items to fit better so we can work safer and more efficiently.

-Della Ray

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It's tough to feel safe when your PPE doesn't fit. For way too long, women have been left out of the conversation about PPE. Thanks to The Safety Rack for leading this important charge toward a safer work environment for everyone. No one is safe if everyone isn't safe!

-Dr. I. David Daniels

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Awareness and education for workers, employers, and distributors about women's PPE are key in making impactful change.

-Sally Morse

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The Safety Rack, 1916 Wyngate Drive. Ames. IA 50010.