



OSHA Hierarchy of Controls

Why This Matters

Every workplace has hazards. OSHA promotes the Hierarchy of Controls as the standard method to reduce risk and protect workers. Understanding and applying these steps helps us create safer job sites, manufacturing facilities, and offices.

The Hierarchy of Controls

The hierarchy is a step-by-step system, starting with the most effective ways to control hazards and moving down to the least effective.

1. Elimination

- Physically remove the hazard.
- Examples:
 - Construction: Remove debris or sharp scrap metal from work areas.
 - Manufacturing: Take broken equipment out of service.
 - Office: Remove trip hazards like cords across walkways.

2. Substitution

- Replace the hazard with something less dangerous.
- Examples:
 - Use non-toxic cleaning chemicals instead of hazardous ones.
 - Switch to a safer tool or machine that has built-in guards.

3. Engineering Controls

- Isolate people from the hazard.
- Examples:
 - Construction: Guardrails around floor openings.
 - Manufacturing: Machine guarding, ventilation, noise enclosures.
 - Office: Ergonomic furniture to reduce strain injuries.

4. Administrative Controls

- Change the way people work.
- Examples:
 - Job rotation to limit exposure to noise or repetitive motions.
 - Signage and procedures for hazardous areas.
 - Training on safe lifting techniques or office ergonomics.

5. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Provide protection when hazards cannot be eliminated.
- Examples:
 - Hard hats, gloves, safety glasses in construction.
 - Hearing protection and welding shields in manufacturing.
 - Blue-light glasses or wrist supports in office settings.

Key Point

Always try to control hazards starting at the top of the hierarchy. PPE is important, but it should be the **last line of defense** after other controls are in place.

Discussion Questions

- Can anyone share an example where we eliminated or substituted a hazard at work?
- Which controls do you use most often in your job?

Takeaway

The safest workplaces apply the hierarchy from top to bottom. Ask yourself: *Have we eliminated or reduced the hazard before relying on PPE?*