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CLOTHING AND WORKWEAR

BEING SEEN ON THE ROADSIDE IS ONE OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF RECOVERY AND VEHICLE MOVEMENT. VRL LOOKS AT THE ROLE OF CLOTHING AND WORKWEAR IN KEEPING SAFE.

Rescue and recovery is a dangerous business, but there are some simple steps that can help those working on the roads stay safe. The right clothing and workwear, and particularly its visibility, is one aspect of best practice that is at the top of the list.

As solicitors Lyons Davidson put it: "The use of reflective materials goes to the heart of health and safety; the very design is to afford protection to any individual coming into contact with them in a hazardous environment."

Workwear is therefore critical to the personal safety of rescue and recovery operatives who work in the most hazardous of environments, often in adverse weather conditions and frequently at times of day – dawn, dusk, night-time – when light is limited.

Wearing the right personal protective equipment (PPE) can mean the difference between life and death. Retro-reflective materials are a basic necessity and standards are in place to ensure that individuals are protected as much as possible.

When attending incidents on roads that have speed limits of 50 mph or above clothing that conforms to EN471:2003 class 3 must be worn. This is a specification standard required by law, having been set after identification of the level of risk. The legislation was drawn up by organisations such as BSI British Standards. EN471 is the minimum standard for high-visibility clothing for professional use and states "where greater conspicuity is required the higher level of retro-reflective material should be used."

The first EN471 standard was written in 1994; the latest revision is EN471:2003. This standard

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was developed after the European Technical Committee requested amendments, having received requests from test houses and committee members, particularly in terms of design freedom. The revision was implemented in April 2004. Class 3 is the highest level of protection offered by the standard. It covers coats and jackets with sleeves, coveralls and two-piece suits and requires a minimum of 0.8m² fluorescent materials and 0.2m² retro-reflective materials.

Independent research has suggested that microprismatic material, invented by Reflexite more than 30 years ago, is the brightest retro-reflective material for use on rescue and recovery workwear. An article in the Health and Safety Bulletin (January/February 2009) placed the two most common retro-reflective materials used— glassbead and microprismatic – side-by-side, concluding that “microprisms are more effective than spherical beads, reflecting more light back so they are brighter.”

The protection of rescue and recovery personnel is not only a health and safety matter. Following introduction of the Corporate Manslaughter Act in April 2008, the safety and workwear issue must be addressed at the procurement stage, because those responsible for kitting-out personnel are directly responsible for ensuring that the best protection is provided.

Highlighting the implications of the Act for

personal safety, solicitors Lyons Davidson emphasised the procurement process, noting that “an organisation must give due regard to a number of issues connected with the selection and eventual usage of reflective materials. In the event of an accident the organisation will have to produce to the investigating authority, whether that is the police or HSE, an audit trail evidencing the process adopted for selection and purchase of those reflective materials.”

Nick Silivestros (Silvestros? check name spelling), corporate sales manager with Dickies UK, echoed the point. “When considering workwear, it is the responsibility of the operator to conduct his own risk assessment to establish the level of protection that staff require. Whether for roadside assistance or welding within a workshop, it is prudent to apply the philosophy of ‘prevention is better than cure’ as there is product range suitable for every working environment.”

He emphasised that in order to ensure that the correct garments are being issued for the correct working environment, the operator should refer to the guidance of PAS 43 or the British Standard Institute. “If in doubt, explain to your supplier the specific working environment in which that the garment will be worn,” he said. “Any credible supplier will be more than happy to offer free advice on garments suitable for each working environment.”

Once you have the right stuff you need to look after it. Any bona fide EN471-certified garment is sold with a technical data sheet within the outer packaging. Garment care and wash instructions are also supplied and must be followed. Remember, ‘classed’ garments (eg jacket EN471 class 3) are not purchases for life. They have a wear cycle, so when the garment tape no longer reflects and the high-visibility fabric is no longer fluorescent, the garment must be replaced.

For more details of the Corporate Manslaughter Act go to
www.hse.gov.uk/corpmanslaughter/faqs.htm

For details of British Standards visit
www.bsi-global.com

The Reflective Equipment Manufacturers Society is at
www.rema.org.uk

For details for the Dickies’ workwear range visit
www.dickiesstore.co.uk

For details for the Reflexite range visit
www.reflexite.co.uk or call 01865 396959 for further clarification regarding standards.