

Women in the Trades

2023 Primeau Law Future of Feminism Award

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As an employee under the *Canada Labour Code*, you are required to:

- use all safety materials, equipment, devices, and clothing that are provided by the employer and are intended to protect employees

But what if the provided safety materials are hindering your ability to perform your duties?



Only 5% of skilled trades workers in Canada are women.

(Skilled Trades Academy)

Why?


“Women don’t realize the option is there.”

“High rates of sexual harassment.”

“Always feeling a need to prove themselves.”

“Mistreatment from coworkers.”

“Feelings of isolation.”



There are a whole host of reasons in which women are not in the skilled trades. But when safety comes into play, things shouldn't be overlooked.

According to a Canadian Standards Association survey, 92% of women reported at least one issue with their personal protective equipment.

40% of these women reported suffering an injury or illness due to poorly fitting clothing or equipment.

This is not okay.

A friend of mine recently went to Mark's to find work pants for her summer maintenance job at a camp.

She quickly found that 'women's work pants' meant nurses scrubs. What she was looking for did not exist in store.

As someone with a 34" inseam, she had to opt for her only option - longs men's pants with a wide waist held up by a belt.

"It's all for men, so what they're saying is: women are nothing more than scaled-down versions of men, and we can get by with wearing the smaller sizes of men's PPE, which is just completely not true." (The Nelson Star)

There are **two** main issues that need to be addressed when it comes to lack of women's work clothes and PPE:

1. Feelings of exclusion
2. Safety concerns



How can we break this barrier?

There are 3 parties who all need to be active participants in reducing the challenges faced by women in the workplace due to ill fitting clothing and PPE:

1. The manufacturer
2. The employer
3. The employee

The manufacturer:

- Should make women's work clothes and PPE readily available and accessible to all employers at no extra cost or effort
- Should consider maternity wear when designing women's clothing
- Should promote women's workwear and ensure employers know this is an option

The employer:

- Should provide all necessary equipment to employees and ensure it is properly fitting
- Should check in periodically with employees to ensure no changes have occurred in the fit of equipment
- Provide new equipment as needed with change in body size/shape at no expense to the employee

The employee:

- Should be made aware that their safety is of utmost importance
- Should have the right to report any ill fitting clothing and PPE to their employer and request new equipment as needed at no expense

In conclusion:

Everyone has the right to work in a safe, comfortable environment;

Providing employees with clothing and PPE that is suitable for their varying body types enables everyone to complete their jobs with less frustration and risks;

Everyone needs to do their part in ensuring that women are protected in the workplace and feel as though they are a welcome member of their team, from the manufacturer right to the employee;

Women are a valued part of our workforce - they deserve to feel that way.

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