

## Evolution of Women's PPE



We have come a long way from "shrink it and pink it" PPE. Let's highlight a safety issue that primarily impacts women—the availability of safety equipment designed for us. When I started my safety career 15 years ago, I was not the typical electrical and utility construction safety person, and I found myself many times as the only woman in a room of my safety peers. Even though I slowly saw more people like me in those rooms, one thing that never changed was the ill-fitting safety shoes and personal protective equipment (PPE) not designed for my body type.

Safety vests traditionally designed for the larger frame of men and typically categorized as "unisex," have an overall fit that is boxy and oversized on smaller frames, leaving me to contend with the hazards of excess material. Gloves did not come in a size small, which meant wearing a medium glove that resulted in excess material at the fingertips, and safety toe shoes designed for females were far too narrow for my extra wide feet, so I wore safety shoes marketed for men.

For years, women sat at the table and politely asked for meaningful change—PPE designed for us! That means going beyond just making the traditional PPE designed for men but smaller and pink. In 2020, GlobeNewswire released a report that included "The PPE market for women stood at \$799.7 million in 2020. Growth is driven by an increase

in women employees across industrial sectors, an increase in awareness, stringent regulatory compliance, and realization of increased hazards at the workplace due to ill-fitting PPE.” Manufacturers once solely dedicated to a one-size-and-design-fits-all approach have come to the realization that women make up a large consumer need, and they have stepped up to provide safety items like vests, boots, gloves and fall protection designed for our body types.

Asking for and waiting for change can be hard. But for those safety professionals and women in industry who sat at the table and made your voices heard, and who told safety manufacturers about our concerns and provided the solutions if I may be so bold to speak for women safety professionals everywhere— thank you!

## About the Author



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Christy’s diverse safety experience spans over 15 years and has gained her a reputation as a leader with “exceeds expectations” work ethic. She is dedicated to partnering with those who perform the work to provide real-world safety management. That experience encompasses policy and procedure development, regulatory compliance, safety program creation from inception to implementation, leadership, and mentoring for safer work environments.

Christy Caputo is the 2023-2025 secretary of the NSC Transportation Safety Division.

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