

## **Communication is key to make the most of female-fit PPE offshore**

*Red Wing has a decades-long history of safety innovation for the oil and gas industry, providing premium-quality footwear, workwear, safety glasses, work gloves and more. From its distribution centres in Aberdeen and Stavanger, Red Wing is a leading provider of head-to-toe PPE to North Sea businesses.*

*We recently caught up with Kristin Hamilton and Kenny Robertson from the Red Wing Shoe Company to discuss the challenges to increasing access to female-fit PPE offshore and more on how the company caters to both genders through its safety footwear and PPE offering.*

*Kristin is Sr. Product Merchandising Manager at the Red Wing HQ in Minneapolis, USA and Kenny is Regional Industrial Director at the Aberdeen HQ.*

**Hello Kristin and Kenny, thanks for talking with us today. Red Wing is a global company that covers many sectors. When did you begin to provide different products designed specifically for both men and women?**

Kristin: Red Wing has been making work boots specifically for women since 1926, and today our dedicated footwear assortment for women has expanded dramatically to meet the rapidly increasing number of women pursuing careers in the trades. We're also proud to say we offer an extensive selection of women's workwear garments in our portfolio.

We see the percentage of women in trades such as construction, manufacturing and energy growing. We have a dedicated product team in Red Wing, Minnesota designing product specifically for her. We want our female consumer to be able to step into these new roles with confidence in the best gear possible to be safe and comfortable. Our Red Wing women's work boots and garments feature the same safety and protection as our men's line.

We continue to grow our women's assortment by listening to her needs and designing specifically for her. For example, our women's garments are cut differently to accommodate a women's unique proportions for a proper fit commonly including narrower shoulders, traditionally shorter arm lengths, and torso. A proper fit increases productivity and comfort and it leverages the garments ability to protect her from safety hazards in the field such as trips and falls.

Red Wing remains dedicated to outfitting women in the trades and we will continue to expand our offerings in the future.

**In order to stay competitive, what does Red Wing do differently to feed innovation and improve your customer offering?**

Kenny: One major difference is that we are one of the few, if not the only, global PPE manufacturer that is vertically integrated. This means we have control over the entire process, from product design and material sourcing all the way through manufacturing, distribution, service and support. The end result is exceptional quality control plus rapid fulfilment and service responsiveness by having facilities in the right places.

Being vertically integrated allows us to keep the voice of our customer top of mind at all times, beginning in the earliest stages of design. We ask women and the purchasing teams directly about their PPE needs so that we can engineer our products to address them.

We also subject every Red Wing product to rigorous in-house and independent third-party testing to ensure they will perform reliably in their intended applications. Our final step before adding any product to our assortment is to let tradeswomen actually wear-test our footwear and garments on the job, so they can share their opinions for further refinement. This is incredibly valuable input.

**One piece of feedback we regularly hear from our AXIS Network community is the difficulty for women to receive PPE that fits correctly, particularly boots, in a timely fashion. How wide is the range of your offering, and how fast do customers receive orders and exchanges?**

Kenny: For starters, we offer our women's safety footwear from a UK size 3. Red Wing garments for women range from size 4 through 18 and are offered in the same colour as men: red, orange, royal blue, navy... the list goes on.

Making these products readily available to consumers is really about two things. First, although some of the companies we work with like us to design custom garments around their specific requirements, many of our industrial accounts don't meet the order quantity criteria to justify the investment. We ensure we have standardised styles available at each hub to meet the majority of company needs — a company can still customize apparel with company branding and other details from our standard offering.

The second part is making our standard offering readily available to all who need it worldwide. We address this by keeping our inventory well stocked at our four major distribution hubs in Aberdeen, Scotland; Stavanger, Norway; Dubai, UAE; and Houston, Texas, USA.

We complement these hubs with local product selection and support, all of which helps keep our fulfilment and response times fast.

**How do you ensure your customers understand the importance of the correct fit and the options available to them through Red Wing?**

Kenny: We offer a variety of outreach programs to keep organizations and their workers informed. Prior to pandemic restrictions, that included visiting customer sites for one-on-one selection and fitting assistance whenever possible, along with offering group training at any of our distribution hubs. We've temporarily replaced these in-person sessions with virtual meetings, but we plan on transitioning back to the same high-touch support as soon as it's safe to do so.

We can also furnish our customers with sizing charts, fit kits and instructional videos. The goal for all of this is the same — we want to empower workers to be advocates for their own safety and comfort.

**We have reports that would suggest women are struggling to get access to female-fit PPE offshore. Where do you think the breakdown is?**

Kenny: From our lens, the product is available and with a number of North Sea employers. When we first engaged in this initiative, we went out to some of our customers and asked them this very same question. Availability doesn't seem to be the issue. The challenges for our customers were around communication and education. Inspired by customer feedback, we will be looking to do a lot more to help educate both supply chain and the end user around the importance of female-fit PPE. We will look to make sure they are aware of and have access to the tools that help their team to find the female-fit that works for them. Women's-fit and fit in general will be a big focus for us.

**We noticed the Red Wing Wall of Honor on your website and were intrigued by the concept. Can you talk a bit about this?**

Kristin: I'm happy to. The Wall of Honor was launched in 2018, and it is one of the most amazing things this company does to recognize the unsung heroes in the trades who keep the world working for the rest of us.

Every year, we send out an open invitation for people to nominate a co-worker, relative or themselves by sharing the story behind their worn pair of work boots. Of the hundreds of incredible stories that come in, a group of my fellow employees has the tough task of choosing a handful to send in their boots to be "retired" on the wall at our flagship store in Red Wing, Minnesota. It is our way of permanently preserving, sharing and respecting their lifetime achievements of hard work.

We hold a nomination ceremony for each year's inductees — the one for 2020 was virtual — and it is always such a moving and meaningful experience. There are several pairs of women's boots up on that wall, all with incredible stories behind them. The most recent group of nominees included the first woman union ironworker in Philadelphia, along with a third generation drilling owner-operator.

We'd encourage everyone to go in and [explore these amazing tributes](#) on our virtual Wall of Honor.

**Thank you so much for your time talking to us today.**

Kenny: It is our pleasure. It has been a good opportunity to review what we are doing and to look for ways to improve so to better this situation.

Kristin: Yes. Thank you in return. We greatly appreciate every opportunity to advocate for women in the trades.