

Size Matters

We recently met with John Watson (Spirit Energy, Senior HSE Adviser Supply Chain) and Victoria Newbatt (Spirit Energy, Senior Category Specialist Wells & Subsurface) to hear about how Spirit challenged their approach to PPE procurement and ensured a range to suit all personnel, inclusive of size and shape.

Who raised the initial concerns over ill-fitting PPE?

It was our Director of Resourcing, Talent, D&I and L&D, Susan Grayson. She had previously been offshore and was aware that the PPE supplied as standard was typically not suitable for all body shapes and sizes. With this in mind, she asked our HSE and Procurement teams to review our offering of PPE with a view to providing suitable kit for everybody. In particular, the ambition was for our female and male colleagues to have equal access to PPE which allowed them to carry out their roles effectively.

Can you explain more about how this transpired, between Susan and yourself supporting the initiative?

JW: I took over as contract owner in Spring 2019 and began a full review of our internal PPE ordering processes and checked all of our catalogue offerings. I have continued to hold monthly meetings with the supplier and speak regularly to manufacturers of our products to understand what developments are ongoing. Availability of different sizes is a factor for almost all products and whether there are womens' specific versions is also part of the conversation.

I have maintained an ongoing dialogue with one of our Barrow Onshore Terminals Asset Technical Support Apprentices (Megan, pictured above), who has been trialling many of our newer ranges and providing feedback. Obviously, this has to be done without compromising the specific safety requirements such as being flame resistant and anti-static. Most PPE manufacturers still do not make specialist products in the very smallest sizes but by having this discussion in our meetings the issue is circulating and products are beginning to emerge. As the workforces in different industry sectors such as construction and energy are becoming more diverse, the PPE product range is starting to grow along with demand. Having the conversation identifying our needs remains critical, and we urge our workforce to provide their input so that I can feed them back into the supply chain.

Our work on inclusive PPE has been included as part of our Incident Free Workplace initiative, of which I am a champion.

Can you go into more detail as to what was particularly unique about the issue with your supplier?

I was aware that women had been previously issued men's design coveralls; so, when I became the contract owner, I introduced women specific coveralls. This initially seemed a good solution but I began to get feedback from our users that their new coveralls were not a good fit. I began regularly engaging with the women in our Barrow and offshore

communities, including safety reps, to determine the problem. Eventually I identified that the manufacturer size label was saying US and UK sizes are the same, when actually it's 2 sizes different (US being the smaller).

The manufacturer did not normally supply the UK with the very smallest sizes and they did not think women size 2 would exist; reality being it is a UK size 6. Others had been making do by downsizing and having the overalls a bit roomy, but this wasn't an option for all involved and was clearly unacceptable as our intention was to have properly fitted coveralls.

I contacted the distributor and manufacturer who eventually accepted this production error. They then began a worldwide search to source appropriate UK size 6 ladies coveralls, to the appropriate safety standards so our workers could have appropriate coveralls. The particular product in the correct colour meeting all the specifications would typically only be made in a production run very rarely due to the limited worldwide demand. I have subsequently changed out the wrongly sized ladies' coveralls for a different product that have correct UK sizes and in parallel changes the men's coveralls to the same product to retain consistency.

Can you explain a bit more about the sizing issues you encountered with the PPE? Was it just that you needed small sizes, or were there other aspects to the fit of the coveralls that were looked at?

There are many sizing considerations. Everyone is different and have different roles so a range of options are needed to allow personal choice within the bounds of required standards. Also, where products are manufactured has an influence. Some have typically broader fit and other have a slender fit, so we look to cater for all types.

Was the focus solely on coveralls, or did you include other PPE like gloves and boots?

We have a full range of ladies' specific boots starting with adult size 2 and a wide range of unisex gloves in a range of sizes. I have also introduced a wider range of safety eyewear sizes with face fit checks and product options that means less debris/dust could enter the eye by being a neat fit.

Did you ever consider (or were you offered by the supplier) 2-piece outfits for women, rather than 1-piece coveralls?

There are ladies' coveralls with a seat zip but we have not chosen those to date. We already supply flame retardant jackets, fleeces and trousers to give the 2-piece option for all workers. The clothing option will also be based on warmth so the ability to wear layers is important, but always bearing in mind that the outer layer must be FR/AS, and both appropriate to the task being performed, and its location.

Our thanks to John and Victoria for sharing their story - we hope it inspires others.