

## **Women's-fit PPE isn't just about comfort, it's about safety!**

This case study is an output from an initiative ran by AXIS Network and Step Change in Safety to drive inclusivity offshore. Red Wing joined in on the project to help identify why in 2021, women were still struggling to access female-fit PPE. According to the OGUK Workforce Report 2019, **women represented 3% of the offshore workforce.**

### **Customer**

Wood, provides engineering and consultancy for the energy industry, specialising in working with clients to reduce risk and improve efficiency while extending asset life. The company is headquartered in Aberdeen, Scotland and does business in more than 60 countries worldwide, employing around 45,000 people.

### **Challenge**

With a steadily **increasing number of women joining Wood's front-line work force**, it became increasingly clear to the company that outfitting these tradeswomen in men's garments and footwear was a less-than-ideal solution. Women were still seen on offshore platforms in baggy coveralls with rolled-up sleeves and trouser legs, as well as wearing safety footwear that was obviously too big and bulky.

Both scenarios open **potential safety hazards on the jobsite**, including a higher risk for slips, trips and falls, not to mention sore feet and blisters. Improperly fitting garments can also get caught in machinery and compromise flash fire protection. "*Women have become accustomed to just going a size or two down with men's boots and swimming a bit in their garments,*" said Louise Thomson, HSE Advisor for Wood. "*But that doesn't mean this is acceptable.*"

Wood is progressive in driving equality in the workplace and, in introducing its female-fit PPE program in 2016, took steps to ensure its female workforce had both the **same safety protection and comfort as its male workforce**, wherever they were in the world.

Female-specific safety footwear and garments existed, but there were **two key barriers to access**. Minimum order quantities could be **commercially unviable** and **restrict size availability**. Downsizing men's PPE had been the go-to solution for several years. Both purchasing teams and female workers needed a bit of help to understand why female-fit was a necessity.

### **Solution**

While looking into the options, Wood learned that its existing PPE partner Red Wing, a global head-to-toe PPE provider with a strong presence in Aberdeen where Wood is headquartered, was an industry leader for outfitting tradeswomen who work in the energy industry globally. Red Wing had already been supplying men's PPE to Wood for a few years and had a working knowledge of the company's product range and working environments. '*Red Wing make my days easy. The team are trustworthy and reliable. We have a strong bond. They work hard for us.*' Said Hannah Mitchell, HSE Coordinator.

Red Wing has been making work boots specifically for women since 1926, and today its dedicated footwear assortment for women has expanded dramatically to meet the rapidly

increasing number of women pursuing careers in the trades. Red Wing also has an extensive selection of women's workwear garments in its portfolio.

The **Red Wing team supported Wood to put together a product framework which could be carried internationally.** They also regularly participate in Wood's monthly PPE forums to make sure the product assortment **evolves** with the business and **the team knows** about regional safety standards as well as new technologies and products.

*"We ordered coveralls from Red Wing's standard offering and then customized from there by adding our logo, a safety essentials patch on the sleeve and moved pockets around to improve the functionality of the garment. Red Wing also provide us with made-to-fit garments and can carry out minor alterations to the leg and arm length quickly from the Aberdeen facility,"* Lucy said. *"Since our order quantity was reasonably low, this helped us control our costs and get our order fulfilled quickly by avoiding a custom job and its minimum order quantities."*

**Red Wing women's safety footwear runs in half-size increments from a UK size 3. Garments are available in women's sizes 4 through 26 and offered in the same colors as men: red, orange, royal blue, navy, etc.**

*"I recently did a wear test of the PetroKing 6" boot, and I didn't even know what I was missing in terms of comfort,"* Louise said. *"They felt so different on my feet and there was such a weight difference. I remember commenting that I would wear these boots all the time, whether at work or not."* Before introducing a new product to a company's assortment, Red Wing frequently conduct wear trials with a sample of their crew.

### **Benefits**

In addition to the obvious safety and productivity benefits that come from correct-fit and enhanced mobility, **female-fit PPE plays a big part in driving equality in the workplace.** Louise mentioned she is beginning to see a paradigm shift within the company in terms of what tradeswomen expect from their PPE in terms of fit and performance.

*"We're excited to see our women workers becoming stronger advocates for their own safety and comfort on the jobsite,"* she said. *"It's gratifying to work for a company that recognizes and values everyone equally. I think women working in men's PPE will soon be a thing of the past."*

### **Improving on service**

Asking Wood for input, the challenge became clear, *'We try to get women to opt for female-fit, however quite often they will order the wrong size. By the time they realize this, they are offshore or at the heliport to check-in on a flight. The window of opportunity to try on a different size is often gone by this point, so they will often revert to a man's coverall because they know their sizes and are used to the fit. Its less hassle for them'* Lucy said. *"Correct-fit is as important to Wood as the correct garment. Any help you can give us to improve understanding around correct fit and motivation behind women's specific garments would be greatly appreciated."*

Following on from this feedback, **Red Wing has pledged** to draw more focus to correct fit and as part of its after-care service will support customers like Wood on their training efforts

by supplying fitting charts, training videos and where possible fit kits, to make sure women offshore can find the product fit that works for them.

*“We know women need specialized PPE. Our job now is to give our team the required training that encourages them to make the change,” Lucy said. “We set out to raise these employees’ expectations for what a proper fit feels like.”*

To learn more on how Red Wing is the ideal provider of female-fit PPE programs: visit [RedWingSafety.com](https://www.RedWingSafety.com)