

How to Prepare for Global Supply Chain Delays in REFLECTIVE APPAREL

By Scott A. Corrao

While consumer products are the focus of supply chain news reporting, global supply chain delays impacting shipments of ANSI high-visibility safety apparel create a worker safety issue. Organizations may experience delays when placing orders to replace worn PPE.

Proper care prolongs the life of safety apparel; however, reflective and fluorescent materials lose effectiveness over time. What might appear fine may, in fact, not be reflecting properly. This may cause decreased visibility, particularly in poor weather conditions. Without proper safety gear, workers are at risk of injuries.

Unfortunately, supply chain delays are expected to continue into 2023 (Miller, 2021). Goods shipped between China and the U.S. via container ship used to take approximately 40 days. However, delays during July, August and September of 2021 were upwards of 70 days (Buchholz, 2021). OSH managers at both private and public organizations must plan ahead to ensure that workers are not without proper safety attire.

So, what can OSH managers do to mitigate safety risks for employees? Following are three ways safety managers can prevent experiencing a gap in the replacement of reflective gear.

Evaluate Replacement Timelines

High-visibility safety apparel is often not the number one PPE order on the minds of those in charge of procurement. Orders are sometimes placed last minute, compared to orders for other gear. Now is the time for OSH managers to evaluate replacement timelines and adjust to accommodate for possible shipping delays.

How far in advance do OSH managers need to plan? Due to supply chain issues, if extremely large quantities of gear or custom-designed uniforms are required, it is wise to place orders with a vendor as soon as possible. This allows time to design, order fabric, construct the gear and have it shipped on time.

It is important to be prepared for custom uniform orders to take upwards of 5 months instead of the standard 90 days. That means if employees need high-visibility rain gear for spring, OSH managers may want to forgo placing custom orders in favor of in-stock items that ship immediately.

Be Flexible

Purchase orders for reflective apparel are often on autopilot; however, current

supply chain delays require OSH managers to examine current needs versus product availability. The key is to be flexible. While some products are unavailable or have extended timelines, many products are in stock. For instance, if a custom order for a reflective winter coat has a longer-than-expected timeline, alternatives such as a reflective vest can be worn over existing winter attire.

Even though adjustments may be made to the type or style of reflective apparel worn, it is critical to adhere to safety standards such as the American National Standard for High-Visibility Safety Apparel and Accessories (ANSI/ISEA 107-2015), established by ANSI.

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High-visibility safety apparel is classified as Class 1, 2 or 3, based on the amount of reflective material and the level of contrast (orange or lime color) of the fabric. The more hazardous a workplace, the higher the required visibility. Class 1 safety garments are for low-impact work environments. Class 2 attire is for employees working near traffic or in low-visibility areas. Class 3 garments are for employees working in high-traffic areas or hazardous areas such as near heavy equipment. No compromises should be made that violate guidelines.

Train Employees on Garment Care

Using reflective garments that have lost effectiveness is unsafe and should be avoided. Dull, faded, scratched or torn garments

should be replaced immediately. Employees should replace garments after the recommended number of washings. Employers should establish a succession plan to replace gear before it becomes a safety risk. Structured programs remove inconsistencies related to human factors, such as independent apparel maintenance and inspection, are budget friendly and allow for more accurate forecasting and business planning.

Even new garments that are improperly cared for can lose effectiveness and pose a safety risk. However, employees can safely extend the life of reflective garments through proper care. Following are recommended ways to extend the life of high-visibility garments:

- Do not wash reflective apparel with garments that have a rough finish, such as jeans.
- Wash garments inside out.
- Avoid fabric softeners, which damage reflective tape.
- Line dry reflective apparel instead of putting it in the dryer.
- If you do machine dry, remove the garment as soon as possible to avoid excess heat, which damages reflective tape.
- Do not wash reflective garments with other dark garments, which may reduce the intensity of the fluorescent color.
- Do not leave dirt on vests, which can diminish the intensity of the fluorescent color.
- Do not store reflective garments in direct sunlight.
- Do not crush reflective tape when storing.

Conclusion

By preparing for global supply chain delays and creating a plan for replacement, organizations can protect their workforce while also maintaining a predictable and manageable budget cycle. **PSJ**

References

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- Miller, G. (2021, Oct. 4). How supply chain chaos and sky-high costs could last until 2023. *American Shipper*. <https://bit.ly/34azBdN>

Scott A. Corrao is president and CEO of Reflective Apparel (www.reflectiveapparel.com), which manufactures a complete line of ANSI 107-2020 and CSA compliant garments.