

Respiratory protective equipment supply services – Feedback from service users in the foundries industry

1. Summary

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that around 12,000 people a year die from past exposure caused by breathing in harmful substances whilst at work. Evidence suggests that despite RPE being a commonly used control measure, good practice is not universally followed, resulting in failure to protect the wearer. Findings from existing research indicate that more robust health and safety policies are required to ensure the necessary levels of protection for all staff including:

- RPE selection;
- Face fit testing;
- Cleaning and maintenance;
- Storage of RPE;
- Staff training

This research sought to explore the influence that suppliers of RPE have upon the decisions made by those purchasing RPE, with a particular focus upon the quality of information and follow up support provided by suppliers. Generally the research found that the contributions from RPE suppliers were positively described by respondents, however the feedback does indicate inconsistencies between the depth and quality of advice provided by different types of suppliers and the extent to which they are forthcoming with any advice and support from the outset.

2. Introduction

This research sought to explore the influence that suppliers of RPE have upon the decisions made by those purchasing RPE, with a particular focus upon the quality of information and follow up support provided by suppliers. This project is part of a wider investigation by HSE into reasons why RPE is not always used appropriately or at all by those who could benefit from it. It is hoped that this research will help to improve the understanding that HSE and industry have of the impact that RPE suppliers have upon the decisions duty holders make when purchasing RPE. This can help those who purchase RPE consider what information they need and whether there is a need to develop their approach when dealing with suppliers. It will also be of use in considering if support for suppliers would be beneficial in the future. This short report provides an overview of the findings from a consultation exercise that was conducted with representatives from the cast metals industry, who are regular purchasers and users of RPE.

3. Background

HSE's 2009 strategy states that in order to bring about improvements in health and safety performance everyone must work together towards a set of common goals.

In order for this to become reality, 'each stakeholder has to understand their role and become better at executing their responsibilities' (2009: 6). The Health and Safety at Work Act places responsibility on those who create risk to manage it. This applies whether the risk maker is an employer, self-employed or a manufacturer or supplier of articles or substances for use at work.

Based on annual statistics for 2008/09, HSE estimates that around 12,000 people a year die from past exposure caused by breathing in harmful substances whilst at work. Around one fifth of workers work with dust, fumes and gases, according to data from HSE's Fit 3 employee baseline survey, and of those who felt that working with dust, fumes or gases could potentially have an effect on their health and safety, 47% reported feeling concerned about developing breathing problems (Glendinning and Bhaumik forthcoming: 78-80). However, there is evidence to suggest that despite being a commonly used control measure; good RPE practice is not universally followed, resulting in failure to protect the wearer. The silica baseline study conducted by HSL (Easterbrook and Brough 2009), sought to develop intelligence in key industries on exposure and control of Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS) - a basic component of soil, sand, granite, and many other minerals. The research explored RPE use in brickworks, stonemasonry, quarrying and construction between 2005 and 2008. The findings suggested that in every sector where RPE should be used to control exposure, more robust health and safety policies are required for RPE selection; face fit testing; cleaning and maintenance of RPE and staff training, to ensure the necessary levels of protection for all staff (2009: v).

More recent research by HSL (Bell et al 2010) has explored RPE selection and use from duty holders' perspectives, looking at what influences management decisions when selecting RPE and implementing RPE programmes for their staff. The research findings suggest that although managers' risk perception was generally good, they did not always give respiratory risks high priority. The research identified that knowledge gaps exist around the need for fit testing and proper storage and maintenance procedures. The research also found that managers, particularly those from small companies, relied upon receiving information about RPE from external sources including manufacturers and suppliers. Advice from manufacturers and suppliers was also found to influence the specific controls selected by managers. The current research now seeks to explore the influence of that RPE suppliers have upon the decisions made by customers further.

4. Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim of this research is to explore service user experience when purchasing RPE. The research sought to address the following specific questions:

- a. What, if any, advice is provided by suppliers of RPE at the point of sale or when enquiries are made by prospective customers?
- b. What is the extent and quality of this advice?
- c. What are the sources of the information/advice RPE suppliers give?
- d. What are the attitudes of suppliers to advice and information giving? (For example are they forthcoming with advice?)

- e. Is follow-up support offered by suppliers and what is the extent and quality of this?

An alternative approach was previously proposed in order to capture the service user experience first hand using a mystery shopper technique. However, this was replaced with a less costly strategy that explored these issues indirectly, by questioning duty holders about their previous experience as service users.

5. Sampling

In order to address the objectives, feedback was collected from duty holders using a questionnaire to enquire about their experiences of purchasing RPE. The questionnaire was administered by external stakeholders the Cast Metals Federation (CMF) to their members. CMF represents the interests of the UK cast metals industry at all levels and the organisation has good links with HSE through its role as an external partner on HSE's RPE steering group. CMF's membership covers a range of foundry sectors and suppliers to the industry and accounts for more than 85% of the output of UK castings. Respondents were contacted in the first instance by CMF and the questionnaire was forwarded onto them via email. Completed questionnaires were returned to named contacts in CMF in the first instance who collated them and passed them back to HSE for analysis.

6. Method

The feedback was collected from CMF members using an electronic self-completion questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for full questionnaire). In total 32 completed questionnaires were returned to HSE for analysis. It was hoped that e-mailing the questionnaire to potential respondents would enable them to answer the questions alone in their own time, thus maximising response rates. The questionnaire comprised a series of closed questions which allows for better comparability between the responses. It should be noted that due to the small number of responses, the findings for the closed questions are reported in terms of the frequency of responses rather than as percentages. The closed questions were supplemented with a concluding open ended question, which gave respondents the opportunity to describe their experiences and opinions in more detail if they wished.

HSE acknowledges the limitations of using CMF members as a sampling frame. The organisation volunteered its members to take part in the research and as an organisation that has strong links with HSE they are likely to be positively disposed towards health and safety and therefore more willing to contribute their views. However, it may not be accurate to assume that the individuals who responded to the questionnaire share the same levels of engagement with HSE that CMF as an organisation advocates. Despite this, using CMF members as a sampling frame does not provide a representative sample of duty holders firstly in terms of CMF members, due to the 'opt in' nature of the research and secondly, in terms of the

wider population of duty holders from the cast metals industry, because not all are members of CMF and those that are not may be very different to those that are. Finally it is also not representative of the wider target population of purchasers of RPE as it is restricted to the views of a single industry. However this exercise has enabled us to get some valuable feedback from duty holders on their experiences of purchasing RPE. CMF members are from a key industry that makes extensive use of RPE to protect employees for various work tasks and their views provide valuable insights into the opinions of a subset of the target population of RPE purchasers in the UK.

7. Findings

In total there were 32 returned questionnaires, although data for some questions is missing as not all questions were completed. The findings are discussed in detail below using extracts from the concluding open ended question to illustrate key findings. The findings are organised according to the issues covered by the questionnaire. It should be noted that due to the small number of responses, the findings are reported as frequencies rather than percentages. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a full breakdown of the questionnaire responses.

Characteristics of the sample

Responses were achieved from a range of different sized companies: twelve were from companies with less than 50 staff; thirteen from companies with 50 to 149 staff and six were from the largest companies (those with over 150 employees). Of the 29 respondents who completed the question, the majority (n=13) had a health and safety role within their company such as health and safety advisor/manager/officer. There were also 6 directors or managing directors and 1 company partner, 4 respondents with an environmental safety role, 2 with quality and technical roles, 1 foundry chemist, 1 purchasing manager and 1 office manager.

RPE in your foundry

The respondents represented a range of foundries as set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Foundry types

METAL	PROCESS	TYPE
Ferrous x 21	Sand x 20	Jobbing x 16
Non-Ferrous x 15	Diecast x 6	Batch x 11
	Inv. Cast x 2	Volume x 9

The findings indicate that most respondents work with ferrous metals (n=21), and the most common process used is sand casting (n=20). There are a range of types, with jobbing slightly more common than the others (n=16).

Respondents were asked whose role is it to identify RPE requirements in their foundry. The word cloud below illustrates the most popular responses:

Whose role is it to identify RPE requirements in your foundry?



The size of the word indicates the extent of its use so it is clear that by far the most common response to this question was the Health and Safety Manager (n=12), and not surprisingly, it was reported that the majority of these people hold a health and safety qualification (23 out of 31).

The most common way to identify RPE requirements was through a risk assessment which was mentioned by all but one respondent (n=30). This was followed by using the results of air monitoring (n=24) and material safety data sheets (n=20). The majority also said that they had received external help to identify RPE requirements (n=20).

Choosing a supplier

Respondents were asked which type of supplier currently supplies the RPE in their foundry. Most reported that they currently purchase RPE from a general safety equipment supplier (n=27), as opposed to a specialist RPE supplier (n=4) or an RPE manufacturer (n=3). Respondents also reported that they have been using their current RPE supplier for some time with answers ranging from 2 years at the least (n=1) to 20 years at the most (n=1). The most common response was 10 years which was recorded by 7 respondents.

Respondents had identified their RPE suppliers in a variety of ways, as set out in Table 2 below. The route for identifying RPE suppliers mentioned by most respondents was that they were a supplier of general tools and equipment to the foundry, which is in line with the finding that this was the most common type of supplier.

Table 2: How did you identify your current RPE supplier?

How did you identify your current RPE supplier?	N
Employee recommendation	3
Other foundry	3
Sister company	1
Supplier of general tools and equipment	12

There were a number of respondents who had identified their RPE suppliers in other ways: one respondent used a corporate preferred supplier of safety equipment, other examples included through the BSIF (British Safety Industry Federation); with help from an ARCO representative (safety expert); through work trials or from attending a health and safety event. Some also provided a more detailed explanation in their own words:

'Identified products then ascertained the best supplier.'

'Some exchange of information with other foundries but mainly through directly approaching the companies as direct local suppliers of safety equipment.'

Respondents were also asked how many suppliers they had considered before making a decision about which supplier to use. Most had considered three or more (n=14). Six respondents said they had considered 2 suppliers and seven reported they had considered just 1 supplier before making a decision.

Working with RPE suppliers

Respondents were asked how they had made initial contact with their current RPE supplier and the majority (n=13) had done so by telephone. Face to face contact was mentioned by 5 respondents and a further 6 reported that an initial phone conversation had been followed up with face to face contact. One respondent commented that *'Trying to get advice over the phone from suppliers is very difficult.'*

In order to explore what, if any advice is provided to purchasers of RPE, respondents were asked whether they had received advice on a range of topics (face fit; wearability; range of alternative products; use; storage and maintenance and the range of alternative manufacturers). In order to also gauge whether the suppliers were forthcoming with this advice, respondents were asked to indicate whether the advice had been offered to them spontaneously; in response to a query, or not at all.

Table 3: Did your supplier provide you with advice about the following?

	Spontaneous (n)	In response to query (n)	No advice given (n)
Face fit advice	12	8	9
Wearability	11	10	8
Range of alternative products available	10	15	4
Use	14	9	6
Storage & maintenance	9	10	10
Range of alternative manufacturers available	6	10	13

The feedback in Table 3 suggests that suppliers were most forthcoming with advice about use (n=14) and face fit (n=12). In response to queries it seems that advice was also commonly given about the range of alternative products available (n=15). The range of alternative manufacturers seems to be the area where most respondents felt they had not received any advice at all (n=13). The feedback from the open text question suggests that there are a range of experiences with different types of suppliers; this seems to be particularly shaped by duty holders' preferences for different sales techniques. Large RPE suppliers and manufacturers for example tend to be more forthcoming with advice and assistance than the smaller companies and suppliers of general tools:

“The large manufacturing companies are normally very happy to visit site and talk about, demonstrate and train users to wear correctly... Generally this is not forthcoming when using a tools supplier for PPE and one has to ask for a visit.”

One respondent described how a large supplier of protective equipment that visits their site on a weekly basis, helped them to identify the best RPE supplier:

“We discussed RPE with them and they brought in external suppliers who demonstrated their equipment... 2 main suppliers were selected. We asked them to provide us with equipment to trial on the shop floor which they did without hesitation. Based on feedback from the personnel who trial the equipment, we decided on the appropriate supplier.”

However the approach taken by the larger suppliers was viewed less favourably by another respondent:

“The large suppliers are very pushy and aggressive in the way they try to push their products. More local suppliers will give more time to explain advantages and disadvantages of certain types of RPE.”

A comparison was also made between general suppliers and more specialist suppliers:

“Very little knowledge of [the] product available from general engineering supplies companies. More available from specialised suppliers but only if requested.”

On the other hand, another respondent described preferring to deal with a general supplier because *‘they are a well established company with a lot of experience’*. From previous experience with dealing direct with manufacturers, they found them to be *‘lacking in sales service’*.

Some of the comments highlight that sometimes duty holders have to ask for advice from suppliers, which is fine if they know to ask, however as one respondent pointed out, *‘You do need to know that the help is available in the first place.’* This could present a problem for people who are new to the role of selecting RPE.

Respondents were generally very positive about the information and advice they have received from suppliers. Of the 29 people who answered this question, 21 rated the advice they had received as very helpful and 23 said they felt very confident that the advice they were given was correct. Some of the comments at the end of the questionnaire support this position:

“As regards suppliers I think they are willing to offer a range of solutions and general advice regarding RPE and we have not generally been dissatisfied with their performance.”

“Overall quite good, advice has been offered and support given where requested.”

On the other hand, not all respondents were so positive about the input of suppliers one described guidance and assistance from suppliers as *‘poor’*.

Respondents were asked whether their current RPE supplier had ever visited their site in person and the majority (24 out of 30) said that they had. For those who answered yes, this was followed up with a question asking whether the supplier had offered advice after viewing the processes at the foundry site and 20 of these respondents reported that they had. Twelve respondents (out of the 29 who completed this question) reported that their supplier had requested additional information from them such as operational information or exposure data. This indicates that a small majority (n=15) were not asked for such additional information by their supplier.

In order to explore the extent that follow up advice and information was provided by suppliers, respondents were asked whether they had received any such follow up support since the last time they purchased RPE. Only 8 out of the 30 who answered

this question reported that they had, 20 answered no and 2 didn't know. Those who had received follow up support were asked to provide details which included regular site visits from their supplier to follow up about things such as whether the RPE was being used correctly, wearability, whether RPE is fit for purpose, whether employees feel happy with it, to keep them updated about new products, updates and modifications. One respondent reported that as a result of a visit from his supplier they had found out about a modification which reduced the cost to the company.

Views on RPE

Respondents were asked about the influence that the cost of RPE has had upon purchasing decisions in their foundry.

Table 4: Has the cost of RPE influenced your choice of the following?

	Yes (n)	No (n)	Don't Know (n)
Supplier?	14	16	-
Disposable vs Non-disposable?	9	19	1
Type of RPE chosen? (e.g. filter, powdered or air fed)	7	21	1

Table 4 above sets out the responses which suggest that cost has been a bigger influence for these respondents upon their choice of supplier (n=14) than it has been for the choice between disposable or non-disposable RPE (n=9) or the type of RPE chosen (n=7). One respondent commented about the role of cost at the end of the questionnaire:

“Although cost is a factor in choosing equivalent protection equipment, it is not used as a determinant to select the correct technology i.e. disposables, although cheaper would not be used to replace permanent masks if the frequency and duration of exposure ... demanded the use of a permanent mask.”

In order to make some assessment of how successfully the RPE purchased has been put into operation, respondents were asked for their views on whether the RPE had been well received by the workforce and whether they felt it had been used correctly.

Table 5: In your opinion, has the RPE supplied been:

	Yes (n)	No (n)	Don't Know (n)
Well received by the workforce?	24	2	3
Used correctly?	25	3	1

It is evident that respondents were generally positive about these issues as the majority felt that the RPE supplied had been both well received (n=24) and used correctly (n=25) by staff in their foundry, although we cannot be sure that the equipment was actually used correctly. The comments of one respondent emphasise the importance of RPE being well received by the workforce:

“In my experience employees offer little resistance to wearing something they can work with, however this is the key if they cannot fulfil their tasks adequately he/she will find a short cut and the RPE will fail. Often this is not down to misconduct; it is usually a frustration of comfort and not being able to wear the RPE selected.”

The respondent goes on to explain that the role of the supplier can sometimes be crucial here as they can *‘engage and help in certain instances.’*

8. Conclusion

This research sought to contribute to an evidence base about the influence that suppliers of RPE have on the decisions made by those purchasing RPE. With assistance from the UK Cast Metals Federation, it has been possible to explore the experiences and views of a subset of the target audience with regards to purchasing RPE.

The findings indicate that respondents tended to purchase RPE from a supplier of general safety equipment, rather than a specialist RPE supplier and that most had been with their current supplier for some time (between 2 and 20 years). Overall respondents were largely positive about the advice they have received from their RPE suppliers; however there may still be scope for improvement as the feedback indicates that the extent of advice given by suppliers can vary. Some respondents reported that they have to ask for advice on certain issues when purchasing RPE, however this would suggest that they would need to have reasonably sound knowledge of what they are buying in order to ask the right questions. Furthermore, only those who are experienced enough to know that they can ask a supplier for advice are likely to do so. The feedback suggests that larger suppliers may be more forthcoming with advice and guidance; however sometimes this can be viewed as ‘pushy’ by prospective customers.

This report discusses the experiences of a sub set of the target population from a specific industry only. It would be useful for HSE to continue adding to this evidence base, drawing upon the experiences of service users from other industries where possible.

9. References

Bell, N., Vaughan, N. and Hopkinson, J. (2010) *Factors influencing the implementation of RPE programmes in the workplace*. HSE RR798. [Online] available from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr798.htm>. Last accessed on 18/07/2011.

Easterbrook, A. and Brough, P. (2009) *Silica baseline survey: Main report*. HSE RR689. [Online] available from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rr689.htm>. Last accessed on 18/07/2011.

Glendinning, R. and Bhaumik, C. (forthcoming) *Improving workplace health and safety: Outline findings from the Fit3 employee surveys 2006 – 2008*.

HSE (2009) *HSE Strategy 2009*. [Online] available from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/strategy/strategy09.pdf>. Last accessed on 18/07/2011.

10. Appendix 1

Questionnaire

1. Please tell us about where you work by marking a cross against the options that apply to the work done at the foundry:

METAL		PROCESS		TYPE	
Ferrous	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sand	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jobbing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non Ferrous	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diecast	<input type="checkbox"/>	Batch	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Inv. Cast	<input type="checkbox"/>	Volume	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Approximately how many people work at this site?

0 – 49 50 – 149 150+

3. Whose role is it to identify RPE requirements in your foundry? (If more than one person has input, please tell us.)

.....
(e.g. H/S manager, general manager etc).

4. Does this person(s) hold a qualification in health and safety management?

Yes No Don't Know

5. How have you identified your RPE requirements?

- a. Risk Assessment
- b. Discussion with supplier/manufacturer
- c. Guidance from MSDS
- d. Results of air monitoring
- e. RPE at work a practical guide (HSG53)
- f. COSHH Essentials sheets
- g. A sister company
- h. Other, (please state)

.....

6. Have you received help to identify your RPE requirements?

Yes No Don't Know

If yes, please state whether this was from within your own company or external advice?

-
7. Which type of supplier currently provides your RPE?
- a. RPE manufacturer
- b. Specialist RPE supplier
- c. General Safety Equipment Supply Company
- d. Other (please state).....

8. How long have you been using your current RPE supplier?

9. How did you identify your current RPE supplier?
- a. Employee recommendation
- b. Sister company
- c. Other foundry
- d. Supplier of general tools and equipment
- e. Other, (please state)
-

10. How many RPE suppliers did you consider before making a decision?
- a. One RPE supplier
- b. Two RPE suppliers
- c. Three or more RPE suppliers

11. How did you make initial contact with your current RPE supplier?

 (e.g. By telephone/Email/Face to face meeting etc.)

Now, thinking about your *current* RPE supplier:

12. Did your supplier provide you with advice about the following? (Please mark a cross in the appropriate boxes to tell us whether they provided this information spontaneously or in response to an enquiry you made.)

	Spontaneous	In response to query	No advice given
a) Face fit advice			
b) Wearability			
c) Range of alternative products available			
d) Use			
e) Storage & maintenance			
f) Range of alternative manufacturers available			

13. If you have received any advice from your RPE supplier, how helpful has this advice has been to you?

Not at all A little Very Don't Know

14. How confident are you that the advice provided was correct?

Not at all A little Very Don't Know

15. a) Did your RPE supplier visit the site in person?

Yes No Don't Know

15. b) If yes, did they offer advice after viewing your processes?

Yes No Don't Know

16. Did your RPE supplier request additional information from you such as operational information or exposure data?

Yes No Don't Know

17. Has the cost of RPE influenced your choice of the following:

<i>(Please mark a cross in the appropriate boxes)</i>	Yes	No	Don't Know
a) Supplier?			
b) Disposable vs Non-disposable?			
c) Type of RPE chosen? (e.g. filter, powdered or air fed)			

18. In your opinion, has the RPE supplied been:

<i>(Please mark a cross in the appropriate boxes)</i>	Yes	No	Don't Know
a) Well received by the workforce?			
b) Used correctly?			

19. Since the last time you purchased RPE, have you received any follow up support or advice from your supplier?

Yes No Don't Know

If yes please provide details.....
.....

20. Please use the space below to tell us anything else about your experiences of purchasing RPE and the performance of RPE suppliers.

Thank you for your help!

11. Appendix 2

Breakdown of responses

Note: Findings are reported as frequency of responses throughout

1. Please tell us about where you work by marking a cross against the options that apply to the work done at the foundry:

METAL		PROCESS		TYPE	
Ferrous	21	Sand	20	Jobbing	16
Non Ferrous	15	Diecast	6	Batch	11
		Inv. Cast	2	Volume	9

2. Approximately how many people work at this site?

Company size	N
0 - 49	12
50 - 149	13
150+	6

3. Whose role is it to identify RPE requirements in your foundry? (If more than one person has input, please tell us.)

Role?	N
Managing director/Director	5
Environmental H&S manager	2
H&S advisor/officer	4
H&S manager	12
Production director/manager	7
Quality manager	3
Site/Foundry manager	3
Occupational health nurse	1
Buyer	1
Department managers	1
Works Director	1
Environmental engineer	1
Engineering manager	1

(Note: Total is greater than number of respondents due to option to give more than one answer)

4. Does this person(s) hold a qualification in health and safety management?

	N
Yes	23
No	6
Don't Know	2

5. How have you identified your RPE requirements?

	N
Risk assessment	30
Discussion with supplier/manufacturer	17
Guidance from MSDS	20
Results of air monitoring	24
RPE at work a practical guide (HSG53)	10
COSHH Essentials sheets	12
A sister company	1
Other (please state)	<i>1 day LEV course; Factory inspector; HSE; Custom and practice; EH40</i>

(Note: Total is greater than number of respondents due to option to give more than one answer)

6. Have you received help to identify your RPE requirements?

	N
Yes	21
No	9
Don't Know	1

If yes, please state whether this was from within your own company or external advice?

	N
Internal	2
External	20

7. Which type of supplier currently provides your RPE?

	N
RPE Manufacturer	3
Specialist RPE supplier	4
General safety equipment supplier	27
Other (please state)	0

8. How long have you been using your current RPE supplier?

	N
20 years	1
15 years	2
10 years	7
8 years	1
6 years	2
5 years	6
4 years	1
3 years	4
2 years	1
'many years'	4

9. How did you identify your current RPE supplier?

	N
Employee recommendation	3
Sister company	1
Other foundry	3
Supplier of general tools and equipment	12
Other (please state)	<i>Identified products then ascertained best supplier; BSIF industry known; Work trials; Due to consignment stock agreement; Some exchange of info with other foundries but mainly by directly approaching the companies as direct local suppliers of safety equipment; H&S event; Local supplier; Manufacturer; ARCO Rep; Corporate preferred safety equipment provider.</i>

10. How many RPE suppliers did you consider before making a decision?

	N
One RPE supplier	7
Two RPE suppliers	6
Three or more RPE suppliers	14

11. How did you make initial contact with your current RPE supplier?

	N
Telephone	13
Face to face	5
Phone then face to face	6
Existing general supplier	2
Requested rep to visit	1
Email	1
Area manager	1
Routine visit from rep	1

Now, thinking about your *current* RPE supplier:

12. Did your supplier provide you with advice about the following? (Please mark a cross in the appropriate boxes to tell us whether they provided this information spontaneously or in response to an enquiry you made.)

	Spontaneous (n)	In response to query (n)	No advice given (n)
Face fit advice	12	8	9
Wearability	11	10	8
Range of alternative products available	10	15	4
Use	14	9	6
Storage & maintenance	9	10	10
Range of alternative manufacturers available	6	10	13

13. If you have received any advice from your RPE supplier, how helpful has this advice has been to you?

	N
Not at all	0
A little	8
Very	21
Don't know	0

14. How confident are you that the advice provided was correct?

	N
Not at all	0
A little	6
Very	23
Don't know	0

15. a) Did your RPE supplier visit the site in person?

	N
Yes	24
No	5
Don't Know	1

16. b) If yes, did they offer advice after viewing your processes?

	N
Yes	20
No	4
Don't Know	2

17. Did your RPE supplier request additional information from you such as operational information or exposure data?

	N
Yes	12
No	15
Don't Know	2

18. Has the cost of RPE influenced your choice of the following:

	Yes (n)	No (n)	Don't Know (n)
a) Supplier?	14	16	0
b) Disposable vs Non-disposable?	9	19	1
c) Type of RPE chosen? (e.g. filter, powdered or air fed)	7	21	1

19. In your opinion, has the RPE supplied been:

	Yes (n)	No (n)	Don't Know (n)
a) Well received by the workforce?	24	2	3
b) Used correctly?	25	3	1

20. Since the last time you purchased RPE, have you received any follow up support or advice from your supplier?

	N
Yes	8
No	20
Don't Know	2

If yes, please provide details:

"Was it being used correctly, came on site to ensure this was the case. Do the employees feel happy with it? Advice on updates and latest versions/modifications. One particular modification resulted in a reduced cost"

"Regular visits from supplier."

"Regular site visits take place."

"Is everyone happy with the product?"

"Keep us updated with new products."

"Contact regarding wearability, fit for purpose, longevity etc."

"RPE rep came and helped with fittings etc."

21. Please use the space below to tell us anything else about your experiences of purchasing RPE and the performance of RPE suppliers.

"Most of the rpe used in the business is disposable P2 and P3 face filters but we also use some permanent masks with specialised filters for painting and specialised filters for welding. Powered filters are used for casting and dressing. We believe the protection levels are suitable for the nature of the work we do. As regards suppliers I think they are willing to offer a range of solutions and general advice regarding rpe and we have not generally been dissatisfied with their performance. Although cost is a factor in choosing equivalent protection equipment, it is not used as a determinant to select the correct technology ie. disposables, although cheaper would not be used to replace permanent masks if the frequency and duration of exposure of an application demanded the use of a permanent mask."

"We have built up a strong relationship with our supplier over the past 6 years. They have carried out on site training of all our rpe users."

"Our rpe requirements are limited to the use of dust masks. Monitoring and sampling proved off that because of casting and break out infrequency and large air volume/mass on foundry site further more elaborate rpe was unnecessary."

"THE LARGE MANUFACTURING COMPANIES ARE NORMALLY VERY HAPPY TO VISIT SITE AND TALK ABOUT, DEMONSTRATE AND TRAIN USERS TO WEAR CORRECTLY. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT PROCESS ESPECIALLY WHEN TRIALLING NEW OR MORE SPECIALISED RPE. GENERALLY THIS IS NOT FORTHCOMING WHEN USING A TOOLS SUPPLIER FOR PPE AND ONE HAS TO ASK FOR A VISIT. THIS IS OKAY IF YOU HAVE A LITTLE EXPERIENCE IN PURCHASING PPE BUT ADVICE MIGHT NOT BE CLEARLY AVAILABLE IF NOT. I HAVE NEVER FOUND THIS A PROBLEM BUT YOU DO NEED TO KNOW THAT THE HELP IS AVAILABLE IN THE FIRST PLACE."

"The rpe supplier has contact with specialist suppliers and puts the company in contact with these suppliers that will come in and carry out a survey and provide trial samples of rpe to test."

"Our current supplier is a general PPE/RPE supplier. They are a well established company with a lot of experience. We have on occasion gone direct to the manufacturers and found some of them to be lacking in after sales service and in one case ignorant. So we now tend to leave it to our general supplier to source unless it is something we can do in house."

"I cannot give a true representation of the experience received from the rpe supplier as I have only been involved in H&S for 12 months, the supplier and equipment was put into place by my predecessor."

"RPE in my opinion is a specialised field in as much as that it is easy to choose or be sold inappropriate product, further more it is imperative that all types are considered as one size does not fit all and there are wearability and comfort issues even with the market leading brands. In my experience employees offer little resistance in wearing something they can work with, however this is the key, what ever is supplied is only as good as the wearer in that I mean if the wearer can not fulfil his tasks adequately he/she will find a short cut and the RPE will fail. Often this is not down to misconduct, it is usually a frustration of comfort and not being able to wear the RPE selected. Employee engagement is imperative as we have found, as different face profiles and shapes raise different issues. A point of caution however is that your supplier needs to engage and help in certain instances and not back off as this clearly makes the process prohibitive. Finally there is face fit testing and all too many suppliers hide behind 'it's a legal requirement' without knowing a great deal about how it affects your business and activities."

"Overall quite good, advice has always been offered and support given where requested. The use of rpe is covered in a general occupational health procedure with emphasis placed on regular assessments."

"Advice on new products; carried out free fit testing to all users of face masks."

"The advice and help when choosing the rpe initially has always been good. However there hasn't been any feedback especially with regard to any changes in exposure limits or improvements in the equipment. We have regular safety audits by external parties that look at the suitability of the rpe."

"Advice geared to certain products (price or profit margin driven?)"

"The use of the www sites of the HSE and various RPE equipment OEMs etc has been useful with regard: 1) The RCS (Silica) Risk and exposure levels; 2) Correct RPE selection, use and employee education; 3) RPE fit testing"

"Guidance and assistance from suppliers has been poor, however because HSE were kind enough to guide us in the selection of RPE, we have been able to understand better our needs and specify the sort of things we feel will work best for our employees. Different styles are purchased depending on the task and individual involved to make them more amenable to be used. I realise advice costs as time is money but our previous experience was that the more companies who are more specifically aiming on supplying PPE in general tended to upsell to more expensive and not necessarily better options. These were not always as well received and tended to be used less effectively."

"Only dealt with one supplier who has been very efficient for service and advice."

"Very little knowledge of product available from general engineering supplies companies. More available from specialised suppliers but only if requested."

"[Name] is our main supplier of protective equipment. They visit the site on a weekly basis and are responsible for topping up safety equipment. We discussed RPE with them and they brought in external suppliers who demonstrated their equipment for us. Discussions were held and 2 main suppliers were selected. We asked them to provide us with the equipment to trial on the shop floor, which they did, without hesitation. Based on feedback from the personnel who trial the equipment, we then decided on the appropriate supplier."

"In our experience trying to get advice over the phone from suppliers is very difficult. A request for the local supplier rep to visit, see the required and discuss the options is much better. The large suppliers are very pushy and aggressive in the way they try to push their products. More local supplier will give more time to explain advantages and disadvantages of certain types of RPE."