

# PPE for Road Operatives



High visibility protection is essential for any staff working on or near roads. Conspicuous fluorescent fabric is needed to help workers stand out during the day, and retroreflective tape alerts other road users to their presence at night. We have decades of experience designing garments to keep workers safe on the road. Below, we share our advice on what road operatives and those working around vehicles should be wearing.

The Department of Transport's guidance is contained in the document 'Safety at Street Works and Road Works – A Code of Practice', aka 'The Red Book'.

Historically, The Red Book Code of Practice was very specific. It stated that garments worn by road workers should meet clause 4.2.3(b) of the high visibility standard EN471. This specifically referenced 2 bands of retroreflective tape on the body and braces over the shoulders. On dual carriageways and roads over 50mph it called for Class 3 Jackets with long sleeves containing 2 bands of reflective on them.

When The Red Book Code of Practice was last updated in 2013, it shifted the onus onto the employer's risk assessment. This allows slightly greater freedom for companies working on roadways since the document is not as specific as it used to be about the design of garments to be worn.

Nonetheless it recognises that for England and Northern Ireland "in most circumstances ... an adequate assessment is likely to indicate a requirement for a jacket with the greatest minimum amount of visible material specified in the relevant current British or European standards" (Page 93).

The guidance for Scotland and Wales is more precise: "High visibility jackets must have full length sleeves and comply with the relevant current British or European standards. Sleeves may be varied to three quarter length where a risk assessment shows full length sleeves would present increased risk due to the activity being undertaken" (Page 93).

The forward to this booklet also recommends that further guidance should be taken from Chapter 8 (Part 2) of the Traffic Signs Manual, published by the Department for Transport. Unfortunately, this Chapter 8 document, although issued in 2017, still references the old BS EN471 standard that was superseded in 2013 by ISO 20471.



All clothing must have 2 bands and 2 braces of reflective tape

Despite the outdated references, the guidance given in this document is quite precise. Road operatives must wear at least Class 2 garments. All clothing must have 2 bands of reflective tape encircling the torso and two reflective braces connecting over the shoulders. This requirement to include reflective shoulder braces is a sensible precaution given how easy it is to obscure the lower bands when carrying something or bending down.

For high speed road use (50mph roads and motorways), a Class 3 garment is required. This should have long sleeves with 2 bands of reflective tape on each. Mirroring the Red Book's guidance for Scotland and Wales, "This requirement may be varied to three-quarter-length sleeves where a risk assessment shows full length sleeves would present increased risk due to the activity being undertaken" (Page 69).

Those working on motorways and high-speed roads should also wear high visibility trousers complying to ISO 20471 Class 1, "where the carrying of large items of equipment or other activities may at any time obscure the visibility of the high visibility jacket." (Page 69).

Our experience is that operators and risk assessors will tend to be drawn to the highest class (Class 3) in most situations where there is vehicle movement and a real risk of injury. The risk assessment will also take into account other factors such as foul weather or sunlight protection required, and any interaction with other necessary PPE.

We hope this article has provided some clarity on the UK's standards of PPE for road operatives.

## References

'The Red Book' - Safety at Street Works and Road Works A Code of Practice  
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7d8038e5274a676d532707/safety-at-streetworks.pdf>



## NB

RIS-3279-TOM Issue 2 is the equivalent Rail Industry Standard for Hi-Vis Clothing.