

Work Gloves to EN 388 — Reading the Four-Digit Code and Matching Gloves to the Task

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How to read the EN 388 mechanical-risk pictogram (abrasion, cut, tear, puncture plus ISO cut letter and impact mark), what EN 511 adds for cold, choosing disposable versus assembly versus winter-lined gloves, and glove discipline that actually prevents injuries.

The EN 388 code, digit by digit

The shield pictogram carries up to six characters, each a tested property:

Position | Test | Scale |

1 | Abrasion resistance | 1–4 |

2 | Coupe-blade cut | 1–5 (X when blade dulls) |

3 | Tear resistance | 1–4 |

4 | Puncture resistance | 1–4 |

5 | ISO 13997 cut (TDM) | A–F (F highest) |

6 | Impact protection | P if passed |

Read it against the task: sheet-metal and glass handling want the ISO cut letter (C and up); rebar and timber want tear/puncture; grinding wants abrasion. EN 511 (cold) adds its own three digits — convective cold, contact cold, water penetration — relevant to the winter-lined class below.

Matching stocked classes to tasks

Assembly gloves — the general mechanics' glove for dry handling, fitting and logistics: Dry-Fit size 8, size 9; sized gloves protect only when they fit — stock the size run, not one-size-fits-all.

Winter-lined assembly gloves for cold stores and outdoor winter work: size 9, size 10, size 11 — dexterity drops with cold hands faster than with lined gloves, so lined gloves are a productivity item, not a comfort one.

Disposable nitrile, extra-strong for oils, refrigerant oil handling, adhesives and inspection: black XL, 100-pack; chemical permeation is time-limited — change them when the task pauses, not when they tear.

Visible-plaster discipline for food-adjacent work pairs gloves with blue detectable plasters (2 × 45 pcs) under the glove.

What gloves don't fix

Gloves near rotating machinery (drills, lathes, bench grinders' wheels) are an entanglement hazard — bare, close-fitting or task-specific solutions apply per the machine's risk assessment. Chemical work needs gloves rated for the specific chemistry and exposure time (EN ISO 374), not "nitrile, probably fine". Vibration exposure is managed at the tool, with gloves as a minor supplement. And no glove rating survives being the wrong size, soaked in oil for a week, or worn through the palm: inspection at issue and a low-friction replacement routine (bin and grab a new pair) beats heroic glove longevity every time.

A simple site standard

Most industrial sites run well on three stocked classes: a sized assembly glove as default, a winter-lined version seasonally/in cold rooms, and disposables for wet/oily/chemical-light tasks — plus task-specific cut or chemical gloves where the risk assessment names them. Put sizes on the rack labels, log consumption per class (sudden spikes reveal process changes), and keep the eye-wash and first-aid points (sterile dressings, eye wash 500 ml) stocked in the same walk — hand injuries rarely travel alone.

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