

F.A.Q.'s on Respiratory Protection

Q: What is a respirator?

A: A respirator is a protective facepiece, hood or helmet that is designed to protect the wearer against a variety of harmful airborne agents.

Q: Can any respirator be used?

A: No, respirators shall be selected on the basis of hazards to which the worker is exposed (i.e., particulates, vapors, oxygen-deficiency, or combination).

Q: Why is a formal respirator program needed?

A: A respirator program increases the chances of using a respirator correctly. A respirator will only protect if it is used correctly.

Q: Who is in charge of the respirator program?

A: The program must be administered by a trained program administrator who is qualified and knowledgeable in respiratory protection to run all aspects of the program.

Q: How is the proper respirator size determined?

A: Proper respirator size is determined through a fit test. Employees using negative or positive pressure tight-fitting facepiece respirators must pass an appropriate fit test.

Q: When is respirator fit testing required?

A: Fit testing of all negative or positive pressure tight-fitting facepiece respirators is required prior to initial use, whenever a different respirator facepiece is used, and at least annually thereafter. An additional fit test is required whenever there are changes in the user's physical condition that could affect respirator fit (e.g., facial scarring, dental changes, cosmetic surgery, or an obvious change in body weight). The employer must be fit tested with the same make, model, style, and size of respirator that will be used.

Q: What can be done if an employee has a very small face and has trouble being fit tested for a respirator?

A: Manufacturers make several different sizes. Respirators may also vary in size from manufacturer to manufacturer. Users may be able to get a better fit by trying a respirator made by another manufacturer. In some cases, the use of powered air-purifying respirators may be appropriate. Employers must help employees find a suitable respirator.

Q: Can a respirator be used by more than one person? How often should it be cleaned and disinfected?

A: Disposable respirators cannot be disinfected, and are therefore assigned to only one person. Disposable respirators must be discarded if they are soiled, physically damaged, or reach the end of their service life.

Q: How long can a particulate respirator be used before it must be discarded?

A: Respirators with replaceable filters are reusable, and a respirator classified as disposable may be reused by the same worker as long as it functions properly. All filters must be replaced whenever they are damaged, soiled, or causing noticeably increased breathing resistance (e.g., causing discomfort to the wearer). Before each use, the outside of the filter material should be inspected. If the filter material is physically damaged or soiled, the filter should be changed (in the case of respirators with replaceable filters) or the respirator discarded (in the case of disposable respirators). Always follow the respirator

Employers must develop standard operating procedures for storing, reusing, and disposing of respirators that have been designated as disposable and for disposing of replaceable filter elements.

Q: What is the proper way to store a respirator that is used routinely?

A: Respirators must be stored to protect them from damage, contamination, dust, sunlight, extreme temperatures, excessive moisture, and damaging chemicals. They must also be packed or stored to prevent deformation of the facepiece and exhalation valve. A good method is to place them in individual storage bins. Keep in mind that respirator facepieces will become distorted and the straps will lose their elasticity if hung on a peg for a long time. Check for these problems before each use.

Q: Are there any additional requirements for the storage of emergency respirators?

A: Yes, emergency respirators must be kept accessible to the work area and stored in compartments or in covers that are clearly marked as containing emergency respirators, and stored in accordance with any applicable manufacturer instructions.

Q: Is training required before a respirator is used?

A: Yes, training must be provided to employees who are required to use respirators. The training must be comprehensive, understandable, and recur annually, and more often if necessary. This training should include at a minimum:

Q: Why the respirator is necessary and how improper fit, use, or maintenance can compromise its protective effect

- Limitations and capabilities of the respirator
- Effective use in emergency situations
- How to inspect, put on and remove, use and check the seals
- Maintenance and storage
- Recognition of medical signs and symptoms that may limit or prevent effective use.

Q: If employees have a beard or moustache, is their respirator still effective?

A: Tight-fitting facepiece respirators must not be worn by employees who have facial hair that comes between the sealing surface of the facepiece and the face or that interferes with valve function. Respirators that do not rely on a tight face seal, such as hoods or helmets, may be used by bearded individuals.

Q: Can employees wear glasses while wearing a respirator?

A: Yes, but if an employee wears corrective glasses or goggles or other personal protective equipment, the employer must ensure that such equipment is worn in a manner that does not interfere with the seal of the facepiece to the face of the user. Contact lenses can be worn with any type of respirator, but their use is not recommended in dusty atmospheres while wearing a half-mask facepiece

Q: If employees get a rash when they wear a respirator with a latex seal, how can this be prevented?

A: Users might have an allergy or sensitivity to the latex or its additives used in the manufacture of some respirators. Changing to a respirator using a silicone-based compound for the face seal, or a respirator that doesn't have a face seal (like a hooded PAPR) may solve the problem. Employers must help employees find a respirator that does