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5 Steps to Make Sure Your Respirator Protects You EVERY Day



Is respiratory health of your workforce a risk for your business?

If people in your workplace are required to wear a respirator then you have a respiratory health risk. Understanding if the respirators selected for use are effective is an important part of the safety management processes.

Current standards mean any person required to use a full face respirator must be fit tested by a competent person, but it doesn't end with fit testing to ensure your people are safe.

Ensure proper respirator use EVERY day.

Understanding a few simple things about the appropriate use of your respirator will contribute to reducing the exposure to harmful substances. Fit testing is exceptionally important but there are things that need to be done every day to make sure they are being used correctly, all the time.

Make sure your program is maintaining a healthy workforce on a daily basis.



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If you have been provided with a respirator by your Employer and you get fit-tested once a year, how do you know that your respirator is protecting you for the other 364 days?

Here are 5 simple steps to show you where to start and what you should focus on to make sure your respirator is protecting you every day at work.



1. Read the manufacturer's instructions

There have been internationally recognised standards for the manufacture and testing of your respirator for decades. So, if the manufacturer of your respirator is popular and well established, there is a good chance they meet standards for things like particle size, fluid resistance and bacteria filtration (in the case of N95 surgical masks).

Manufacturer's instructions are included with every elastomeric respirator and with every box of disposable respirators. It is a good idea to go over these instructions a few times whenever you are fit with a new respirator or when you haven't worn your respirator for some time.

- **Intended Use:** As a matter of first importance, make sure you are wearing the correct respirator. Respirators designed and manufactured for the health sector (e.g. hospitals and personal care) are not designed for an industrial or construction setting. Similarly, respirators that are designed to protect against airborne infections are not used in protecting against gases or vapours.
- **Facial Hair:** Beards or other facial hair prevent a good seal for the respirator and ALL manufacturers recommend that in order to be protected. Wearers must be clean-shaven. However, there are a couple of concessions and workers must refer to manufacturers resources before they champion their facial artistry.
- **Reusing Your Respirator:** Elastomeric respirators have disposable filters and do not need to be disposed of unless a facepiece is faulty and needs to be replaced. N95 respirators do not necessarily need to be discarded after every use but wearers need to refer to the regulations or policies that apply to their job role or environment.

- **Storage:** Respirators are fairly hardy pieces of equipment in terms of the environments they can bear. However, manufacturers have specific instructions around environmental extremes you should avoid. It is important to know that boxes of disposable respirators have an expiry date and therefore, they do not have an unlimited shelf life.



2. Always check your respirator before use

Always inspect your respirator prior to putting it on to ensure that it is in good working order. Every component of a respirator can fail during manufacture or with use. Manufacturer's instructions are a good source of information for helping you know what to look for.



3. Donning and Doffing

- Donning – putting on PPE (personal protective equipment)
- Doffing – taking off PPE (personal protective equipment)

Donning and doffing (putting on and taking off your respirator) needs to be done according to the manufacturer's instructions. Pictures are generally included in these instructions which make the process easy to follow.

Often, you will find that donning and doffing procedures are specific to the environment that the respirator was designed for. For example, for respirators used in health, doffing procedures are designed to minimise contamination to the wearer as they dispose of the respirator or respirator filters. In the case of all respirators, manufacturers recommend that donning and doffing be performed in a safe area away from airborne contaminants and infections.



4. Check for a good seal

User seal checks must be performed as soon as the respirator has been donned (put on). A Negative Pressure User Seal Check is performed when the wearer breathes in and creates negative pressure inside the respirator's breathing zone. For elastomeric respirators with disposable filters, this is done whilst blocking the filters. A Positive Pressure User Seal Check is performed when the wearer breathes out and creates positive pressure inside the respirator's breathing zone. For elastomeric respirators with disposable filters, this is done whilst blocking the outlet diaphragm.

Both user seal checks allow the user to quickly determine if the respirator has a good fit or is leaking around the sealing edge or the filter attachment. In each case, the respirator is disposed of if a good fit cannot be achieved by adjusting the respirator straps or replacing faulty parts.



5. Get Fit Tested

Every year you must be fit-tested to ensure that the respirator you are being issued with is right for the shape and size of your face. If the model of your respirator has been changed in any way since your last fit test, then you must be fit tested again.

Ideally, a good Respirator Fit Testing Program will provide you with more than one type of respirator to choose from and should cover all the main points of this article as part of educating the wearer.

Make sure that you are wearing your normal personal protective equipment (PPE) when you are Fit Tested. Then, if you have a good fit while wearing all your PPE, you can be confident that your respirator is keeping you safe while you are carrying out the activities of your job role.

In a Nutshell

These 5 steps are non-negotiable if you want to guarantee your respirator is protecting you year-round. Putting in place the right respiratory health protection program ensures everyone knows how to select, fit and maintain their selected respirator.

Here are the 5 steps again:

1. Read the manufacturer's instructions
2. Perform your fault-finding inspection before you don your respirator
3. Don and doff your respirator correctly
4. Perform user seal checks every time you don your respirator
5. Turn up to your fit-testing appointment every year

To get your respirator fit testing program into place - give us a call or book online.

BOOK NOW



or

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