

FACT SHEET

RESPIRATORY PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT – ADVICE FOR EMPLOYEES

How to use your respiratory protective equipment and stay healthy.

This information is for employees who use respiratory protective equipment (RPE) at work. RPE is a type of personal protective equipment (PPE) that protects the wearer from breathing in hazardous substances.

EFFECTS OF BREATHING HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES

Hazardous substances in the air can be in dust, mist, vapour or gas form. Common health effects from breathing hazardous substances include: headaches, forgetfulness, drowsiness, feeling dizzy and sick, mood changes, sore eyes and sore skin. Long term effects include: sleep disorders, memory loss, cancer, organ damage, fertility problems and death.

WHEN DO I NEED TO WEAR MY RPE?

- > You need to wear RPE when you're doing work where you could breathe in hazardous substances that can damage your lungs or poison you.
- > Always follow operating procedures. These should tell you what sort of PPE, including RPE you need to wear.

Use the right respirator and cartridges

If you use different RPE for different tasks, make sure you are using the right one for the task. For example negative pressure

respirators should not be used in low oxygen environments and particulate filters don't provide protection against gases.

Some types of RPE must have a tight seal around your face to be effective. Your employer will arrange a facial fit test to ensure that you are given RPE that fits properly. A fit test checks the seal between the respirator and your face by using a substance that you can smell or taste, or a special piece of equipment that tests the air inside the mask.

It is important that you use only your own RPE that has been fit for you. Don't share with others.

USING RPE

Your employer will arrange for training on how to use and look after your RPE. You should follow these instructions every time you wear your RPE.

Face-pieces that require a tight fit

If you're using RPE that requires a tight fit always check it before entering a hazardous area. There are two 'fit checks' that you should do.

FIT CHECKS FOR HALF FACE AND FULL FACE RESPIRATORS



Positive pressure fit check

1. Block the exhalation valve with the palm of hand.
2. Gently exhale and hold for about 10 seconds.
3. Check to see if the respirator is bulging slightly.
4. If the respirator remains bulging and there are no leaks between the face and the respirator, the respirator fits properly. If leaks are detected readjust the straps and check again for a proper fit.



Negative pressure fit check

1. Block the cartridges/filters with the palm of hand.
2. Gently inhale and hold for about 10 seconds.
3. Check to see if the respirator is collapsing slightly.
4. If the respirator remains collapsed and there are no leaks between the face and the respirator, the respirator fits properly. If leaks are detected leaks adjust the straps and check again for a proper fit.

If you can't get your RPE to fit properly talk to your employer as you may need to get another size.

Facial hair and stubble make it almost impossible to get a good seal between your face and the RPE. If you have a beard, you should talk to your employer about other forms of RPE that do not rely on a tight face fit. Jewellery, glasses, long hair and makeup can compromise face fit.

CHECKS FOR POWER ASSISTED AIR PURIFYING RESPIRATOR (PAAPR) AND SUPPLIED AIR RESPIRATORS (SAR)

- > Before using PAAPR and SAR check that all the hoses are connected properly.
- > Check the battery is fully charged and that there is an adequate clean air supply.
- > Follow the manufacturer's recommendations.
- > Stop working if the airflow rate drops or any of the warning devices activate.

CLEANING RPE

- > Your RPE should be cleaned after each use.
- > Follow the instructions from your training and the manufacturer's instructions.
- > Since cleaning RPE can be quite complicated, your employer may arrange for specialist cleaning.
- > If you are cleaning your own RPE use the recommend detergent and disinfectant as some harsher products can cause damage.
- > Once cleaned and disinfected, RPE must be rinsed well to prevent skin irritation.

MAINTAINING RPE

- > Inspect your RPE regularly for signs of damage.
- > Check the straps for breaks, tears and loss of elasticity.
- > Check the inhalation and exhalation valves are working and not damaged.
- > Replace particulate filters if there is an increase in resistance when breathing, if they are damaged or if they're passed their service date.
- > Replace gas filters when scheduled.
- > For PAAPR and SAR check the connections and settings.
- > Check the battery charge and flow-rate for powered devices.

STORING RPE

- > Your training should cover how to store your RPE. If it doesn't, follow the RPE manufacturer's instructions.
- > Store your RPE in a clean dry place, away from dust, oil and sunlight. RPE should be stored so that it doesn't get crushed.
- > Keep gas and vapour filters in containers or bags with tight seals.

HEALTH MONITORING

If you use RPE or other PPE at work your employer must make sure your health is monitored. Health monitoring ensures that your health is not being affected by your work.

Your employer must have your permission to undertake health monitoring and they must give you your results.

Testing for health effects from substances that you breathe often involves a lung function test, but blood and urine tests may also be required.

CHECKLIST FOR EMPLOYEE RECORD

- My employer has provided me with RPE and explained the hazards that it will protect me from.
- I have been facial fit tested for my RPE.
- I have been trained how to use my RPE and store it.
- I understand that I am not to share my RPE with others because the RPE given to me has been fit tested for my use only.
- With my employer's help, I will maintain a regular cleaning, maintenance and storage routine for my RPE.
- I will undertake a daily visual inspection of my RPE and undertake a positive/negative pressure test to ensure there is complete seal before using it in a hazardous area.
- I have read and understood the manufacturer's guidelines for my RPE.
- I am aware of the hazards from the substances I am working with. I know what to do in an emergency such as a spill or first aid incident.

Employer signature _____

Employee Signature _____

Date _____

FURTHER INFORMATION

Respiratory Protective Equipment - Advice for Employers.

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