7 MINUTE Safety Trainer

Proper Fit for Respirators

Handout

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations require workers to use respirators to protect themselves when there is a serious threat to their health.

- Conditions include areas with airborne contaminants, such as chemical vapors, gases, or dust; too little oxygen; or other serious health hazards.
- Different types of respirators are designed to protect against different health hazards.
- With **air-purifying respirators**, the air passes through a filter, cartridge, or canister that removes specific contaminants.
- **Atmosphere-supplying respirators**—either self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBAs) or supplied-air respirators (SARs)—provide you with breathing air from an independent source.

Not all workers can wear respirators safely—they must all have medical evaluations before they can be fit-tested.

- Fit tests must use the same respirator make, model, style, and size that will be used on the job.

Check out the appropriate respirators for the job hazard—select one and try it for at least 5 minutes to see if it is comfortable for you.

- Check for positioning on the face and room for eye protection.
- Check for ability to talk while wearing the respirator.
- Check to be sure there is a good fit without slippage, even if you move about as you would on the job.

Employers must provide training in respirator use and proper fit—respirators won't protect workers unless they are used properly.

- Qualitative fit tests (QLFTs) assess the respirator's fit based on the individual's response to a test agent's smell, taste, or irritation.
- Quantitative fit tests (QNFTs) assess fit by numerically measuring the amount of leakage into the respirator.

Workers must also perform a user seal check each time they use a tight-fitting respirator.

- For a positive pressure seal check, cover the exhalation valve and exhale gently—the mask should inflate slightly, with no evidence of leaks.
- For a negative pressure seal check, cover the inlet opening, inhale gently, and hold your breath—the face piece should remain deflated, with no inward leakage of outside air.
- Leave the work area immediately if you notice vapor or gas getting into your breathing zone, face piece leakage, or changes in your breathing.
- Don't reenter the respirator use area until your respirator is repaired or replaced.

Be sure your respirator fits properly, that you know how to use it, and that it is in good condition so that it provides the protection to keep you safe.