

FACT SHEET

Respiratory Protection

Are you concerned about possible airborne hazards in your work environment? The law requires employers to provide respiratory protection to employees who are exposed to concentrations of potentially harmful substances exceeding established Permissible Exposure Limits (PELs).

There are several ways to protect against exposure to airborne contaminants. The most effective are engineering and administrative controls. (Engineering controls can include measures such as increasing ventilation or installing a fume hood; administrative controls involve changes in work procedures.) The law requires that these controls be considered before employees are issued respirators. If engineering and administrative controls are infeasible, respirators can be assigned.

Getting the Right Respiratory Protection

The Office of Environment, Health & Safety (EH&S) works with your department to analyze the work environment and decide which protective measures are necessary. Here is an outline of the process.

1. Employee lets their supervisor know about possible respiratory hazards in the workplace.
2. Employee's supervisor contacts the Department Safety Coordinator and EH&S to evaluate the work environment.
3. EH&S analyzes the work environment to determine if airborne hazards exist. If hazardous air contaminants exist, EH&S determines how they can be reduced to acceptable levels through engineering or administrative methods.
4. Employee's Supervisor implements the recommended controls. If controls are infeasible, he or she must do the following:

The employee must obtain medical clearance by calling the University Health Service Occupational Health Clinic at 2-6891 to make an appointment for a respirator physical. Medical clearance will be mailed to the EH&S respiratory protection program.

After medical clearance has been received by EH&S, an appointment can be made for a respiratory fit test. The employee needs to provide EH&S with the following information:

- A. A list of the substances the employee is potentially exposed to which may require respiratory protection
- B. An MSDS (Material Data Safety Sheet) for each substance

If EH&S issued a respirator to the employee in the past five years, the employee needs to bring the respirator to the appointment. If the employee has lost the respirator they must bring an IOC for \$25 for a half-face respirator or \$150 for a full-face respirator.

5. EH&S trains the employee to put on, maintain, clean, and wear a respirator. EH&S then fit-tests the employee and issues a properly fitting respirator.

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Respirator Responsibilities

Both the employee and the employee's supervisor have legal responsibilities to ensure that respirators are used properly.

| Who's Responsible | Action |
|----------------------------|--|
| Employee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returns for annual medical clearance and refitting. • Uses the respirator only for the assigned hazard and cleans and maintains the respirator as trained. • Notifies their supervisor of any changes in the workplace. |
| Employee's Supervisor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies, with the help of EH&S, those employees who may need respiratory protection. • Ensures employee is in the Respiratory Protection Program and is properly using, storing, cleaning, and maintaining the respirator. • Ensures employee receives annual fit-test, medical clearance, and retraining from EH&S. • Periodically discusses proper respirator use during safety briefings. |
| University Health Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a medical examination to approve the employee to wear a respirator. • Sends medical clearance to EH&S. |
| EH&S | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides new filters when necessary (costs are recharged to the employee's department). • Maintains written documentation of training and required annual refitting. • Conducts periodic air monitoring to ensure adequate respiratory protection. |

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Additional information about respirators

Engineering and administrative controls are always preferable to the use of a respirator. Respirators should only be considered if no other solutions are viable because the possibility for human error makes the respirator less reliable than other controls.

Do not buy a respirator without consulting EH&S. Various respirators are designed to protect against distinct hazards. EH&S will determine which is the best respirator for a particular situation. Also, do not mix brands of respirators and cartridges because parts are not interchangeable.

Men must be clean-shaven to wear a respirator. Most respirators will not provide the necessary tight seal over a beard or stubble.

Never borrow or lend a respirator. Each respirator has been specifically fitted to the person designated to wear it. An ill-fitting respirator is dangerous.

Do not wear a respirator into a situation that has not been evaluated by EH&S. Different environments may require a change in assigned cartridges or respirators. No single respirator is good for all situations.