FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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. When is the use of respirators required?

A. OSHA's respirator standard, 29 CFR 1910.134, requires the use of respirators to protect employees from breathing contaminated and/or oxygen-deficient air when effective engineering controls are not feasible, or while they are being instituted. Several other OSHA regulations also require the use of respirators.

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). Also, OSHA requires the use of certified respirators for safety. For help with respirator selection, please see the EH&S Respirator Selection Guide.

Q. Why do I need to go through EH&S to be able to use a respirator?

A. Going through EH&S increases the chances of using the respirator correctly. EH&S program administrator shall direct user on proper selection, training, fit testing and maintenance of
A respirator will only protect if it is used correctly. Also, OSHA requires a number of written elements for respirator protection program as recognized and managed by EH&S.

A. EH&S office through its trained program administrator who is qualified and knowledgeable in respiratory protection. The program administrator can be contacted here or by phone at 326-6166.

A. The program involves coordinated process for the use of respirator which includes procedures for selection, medical evaluation, fit testing, training, use and care of respirators.

A. Proper respirator size is determined through a respirator fit test. Employees approved to use negative or positive pressure tight-fitting facepiece respirators must pass an appropriate fit test using the procedures detailed in the EH&S respiratory protection program.

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). EH&S performs all fit tests using the same make, model, style, and size of respirator that will be used.

A. Yes. When respiratory protection is required and respirators are issued to employees, OSHA requires fit testing be conducted as part of that respiratory protection program. If a respirator is used voluntarily in a situation where respiratory protection is not mandated, then fit testing is not required.

A. A physician has to determine the employee’s ability to use a respirator before the employee is fit tested or required to use the respirator in the workplace. The Office of Prospective Health performs this evaluation (medical) at no cost to prospective user. Please see the EH&S website for medical evaluation questionnaire.

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.

A. Yes, but if an employee wears corrective glasses or goggles or other personal protective equipment, EH&S must have to inspect it to ensure 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.

A. Respirators are designed for higher filtration efficiency and better facial fit than standard face masks. Respirators must be approved by NIOSH and all NIOSH-approved respirators must be marked as such. Look for the NIOSH approval label and on product dispensers and the NIOSH
assigned approval code on each respirator if you are unsure if a product is a respirator or a standard face mask.

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 filter manufacturer's service-time-limit recommendations. See EH&S respiratory protection program for cartridge change schedules and maintenance of respirators.