



070: Respirator Use and Testing

Respirator types

Respirators range from simple dust masks to Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) units to units connected via hose to a central air supply.

Respirator selection

Normally, someone else will select the respirator you need for the job at hand. However, be sure you check that the respirator is adequate for the job.

Respirators are often used in conjunction with confined spaces, so check your confined entry permit for the hazards contained in the area, if appropriate.

Your supervisor can help you determine the correct respirator for the job.

Prepare yourself

You must be respirator-qualified and clean-shaven to use any respirator other than a dust mask.

If you have clogged sinuses, use a decongestant nasal spray or saline solution to clear them. Taking a systemic (oral) decongestant will leave you in a state of vasodilation—check with your safety director before doing this. Under no circumstances should you take an over-the-counter antihistamine, as these increase drowsiness that can endanger you.

If you are a smoker, abstaining from smoking for several hours or days prior to planned respirator work will increase your respirator endurance dramatically by increasing your lung efficiency and lowering the levels of carbon monoxide in your blood by several orders of magnitude.

Prepare the respirator

If it's a filtering-type unit, ensure it has the right filter, canister, or cartridge attached.

If SCBA, ensure the tanks have enough pressure for the duration of the job.

If it's hose-connected, help your attendant to check the hoses, or wait while it's done before entering the work area.

Wipe the facemask with an alcohol pad or similar disinfectant prior to use.

Check the respirator fit using the negative pressure method shown in training. If, for example, you are using a canister filter, hold your hands over the canisters and inhale. The filter should collapse around your face and stay collapsed until you exhale. Your procedures may also call for you to perform the positive pressure method. If so, take care not to blow too hard.

Test the vent port to ensure you can exhale through it.

Use the buddy system

If you feel fatigue, panic, nausea, or other symptoms of distress coming on, motion to your coworkers that you must leave the area. If there is only one coworker with you, help him or her get to a stopping point and leave together. Report to your foreman immediately.

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Obtain a respirator, preferably a cartridge style, to demonstrate cleaning and testing during the discussion portion.

What this Safety Talk covers:

How to get the intended protection from a respirator.

Discussion notes :

