RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

Respirators protect workers from a wide variety of hazardous environments. They can enable employees to safely work around harmful dusts, smokes, mists, fumes, gases, vapors, or sprays. Some worksites expose employees to:

- Dust (silica, wood, drywall)
- Fumes (welding, cutting, or burning)
- Mists and vapors (paints, solvents, or adhesives)
- Asbestos or mold in renovation or demolition work

Without proper respiratory protection, these substances can lead to serious health issues such as silicosis, lung disease or cancer.

Types of Respirators

There are two major classes of respirators.

1. Air-Purifying Respirators (APRs) – Filter out contaminants (e.g., N95, half-face, full-face)
2. Atmosphere-Supplying Respirators – Provide clean air from a tank or remote source (e.g., SCBA)

Respirators can be either tight fitting or loose fitting. Tight fitting respirators include filtering facepieces, half masks and full facepieces that don't completely cover the head. Loose respirators are hoods or helmets that cover the head completely. All respirators used in the workplace must be approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Best Practices

- Always wear the right respirator for the job and contaminant.
- Inspect your respirator before each use.
- Ensure a proper seal—no facial hair in the sealing area.
- Read and understand the manufacturer's guidelines provided.
- Report any issues with fit, function, or comfort.

According to OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134

- Employers must provide the appropriate respirators for the hazard present.
- A written respiratory protection program is required if respirators are used regularly.
- The program must include:
    1. Medical evaluations – The OSHA standard mandates that a physician or other licensed healthcare professional (PLHCP) assess an employee's ability to safely wear a respirator before they are allowed to use one. The PLHCP will determine if a pulmonary function test is required for respirator use.
    2. Fit testing - Workers must be given a fit test to ensure that their respirator is the correct size and forms an adequate seal.
    3. Training - OSHA requires that all employees be fully trained on respiratory protection prior to use. Workers must be trained on the limitations and capabilities of the respirator, how to properly inspect, maintain, and store the respirator. They must also know how to properly wear the respirator, including how to put it, take it off, and check the seal. Employees must be retrained annually, or if they demonstrate inadequate knowledge of any part of the respiratory protection program.

Respiratory Protection Summary

Respirators protect employees from hazardous atmospheres and airborne contaminants in the workplace. Before receiving a respirator, employees must complete a medical evaluation given by a medical professional, provided a respirator fit test and be trained on various aspects of their respirator.

GCSC Resources

Occupational Health Services: 6:00am – 2:00pm / Questions? ohs@mygcsc.com
Medical Clearance OSHA Questionnaire – 08RSPCLR
Fit Testing – 08RFTFF/08RFTHF/08RFTN95/08RFTSA
Pulmonary Function Test – 08PFT

Safety Training: 6:00am – 3:00pm / Questions? csr@mygcsc.com
Respiratory Protection – A08RSP

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