



Respiratory Protection

Respirators are an important aspect of safety and health protection in the workplace. Respiratory hazards in the workplace should be controlled whenever possible using engineering, work practice, or administrative controls. However, if these controls are not feasible or do not provide sufficient protection, employees may need to utilize respiratory protection.

Respiratory hazards include:

- Harmful dusts (lead, silica, and other heavy metals)
- Fumes and smokes (welding fume)
- Gases and vapors (chemical exposure)
- Biological hazards (tuberculosis, whooping cough, flu viruses)

There are 2 main types of respirators: Air-purifying respirators and atmosphere supplying respirators. Choosing the appropriate type is very important.

Air-purifying respirators (APR) clean the air you breathe using filter, cartridges, or canisters. APRs include half-face, full-face, N95, and PAPR respirators.

Atmosphere supplying respirators supply the user with breathing air from a source independent of the ambient atmosphere. Supplied air respirators (SAR) and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) are examples of atmosphere supplying respirators.

The first step in selecting a proper respirator is to have the workplace assessed to determine the level and type of contaminant(s) present. All employees must then be medically cleared, trained and respirator fit-tested prior to respirator use. Retraining and fit-testing is required on an annual basis.

In caring for your respirator, you should inspect it prior to each use. Check for missing or worn parts. For air-purifying respirators, the proper cartridge or filter must be selected based on the hazard present. Respirator users must know the limitations of their respirator and stay clearshaven to ensure a proper fit and seal. Workers should not share respirators and should only use the respirator they have been fitted for. And finally, respirators must be cleaned and stored properly after each use.