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Respiratory Protection

SAFETY TALKS TOOLKIT

Respiratory protection must be worn whenever you are working in a hazardous atmosphere. The appropriate respirator will depend on the contaminant(s) to which you are exposed and the protection factor (PF) required. Required respirators must be NIOSH-approved and medical evaluation and training must be provided before use.

Checklist for Proper Use of Respirators

- Workers using tight-fitting respirators should have no conditions, such as facial hair, that would interfere with a face-to-facepiece seal or valve function.
- Workers wear corrective glasses, goggles, or other protective equipment in a manner that does not interfere with the face-to-facepiece seal or valve function.
- Workers perform user seal checks prior to each use of a tight-fitting respirator.
- Protect from contamination, dust, sunlight, extreme temperatures, excessive moisture, damaging chemicals, or other destructive conditions
- Prevent the facepiece or valves from becoming deformed.
- Employees are permitted to leave their work area to conduct respirator maintenance, such as washing the facepiece, or to replace respirator parts. Employees do not return to their work area until their respirator has been repaired or replaced in the event of breakthrough, a leak in the facepiece, or a change in breathing resistance.
- Respirators may be repaired only by an appropriately trained person, who must use NIOSH-approved parts that are designed for the particular respirator being repaired. Valves, regulators, and alarms must be adjusted and repaired only by the manufacturer or a technician trained by the manufacturer.

Inspection

- Check respirator function, i.e., visual inspection to identify any parts that may be missing, distorted, blocked, loose, deteriorated, or otherwise interfere with proper performance.
- Check elastomeric (rubber) parts for pliability and deterioration.

A respirator should be removed from service when:

- A cartridge has become saturated or a contaminant has broken through the cartridge.
- A respirator strap, buckle, or connection is damaged or missing.
- The mask portion of a respirator is misshapen or degraded and can no longer form a good seal around the user's face.

User seal checks

- To conduct a user seal check, the worker performs a negative or positive pressure fit check.

For the negative pressure check, the worker:

- covers the respirator inlets (cartridges, canisters, or seals)
- gently inhales, and
- holds breath for 10 seconds.
- The facepiece should collapse on the worker's face and remain collapsed.

For the positive pressure check, the worker:

- covers the respirator exhalation valve(s); and exhales.

The facepiece should hold the positive pressure for a few seconds. During this time, the worker should not hear or feel the air leaking out of the face-to-facepiece seal.