

The Safety Minute

Respiratory Protection

As almost everybody already knows, on October 5th 1998 a new OSHA regulation on **respiratory protection** took effect. All shop operators must comply with this new regulation, which includes mandates on **medical evaluations, the written respiratory protection program, respirator selection, fit-testing and seal checks, maintenance and inspection, training, and program evaluation and record keeping.**

Medical Evaluations: Under the new rule, you will need a physician or other licensed health care professional to evaluate anyone who wears a respirator. The physician must follow the medical evaluation questionnaire contained in [Appendix C of 29 CFR 1910.34](#). A written recommendation from the physician stating that the employee is able to wear / use a respirator is also required and should be kept on file. An annual review of an employee's medical status is not required unless specified by the physician. The employer, not the employee must pay for the medical evaluation. This evaluation **must** be performed before an employee is able to pass a fit test.

Written Respiratory Protection Program: The biggest change in the rule is that you now have to write a workplace-specific respiratory protection program. Some of the workplace-specific areas that that must be contained in this program include: Procedures that require a respirator; how employees were trained about respiratory hazards in the workplace and on the use of respirators; procedures and schedules for respirator maintenance; procedures for the proper use of respirators in routine and emergency situations; a record of the dates and the successes and failures of fit-testing given to employees; and procedures for how the respiratory protection program is evaluated and maintained.

Respirator Selection: Facilities must select the proper NIOSH approved respirator based on each employee's exposures to hazardous materials.

Fit-Testing: A tight fitting facepiece respirator must be fit-tested on each employee before they can use it (medical evaluations must be performed prior to this). The fit test must be performed **at least** annually or when a different facepiece is used. Unless an employee is wearing a hood-type respirator, no facial hair is permitted.

Maintenance & Inspection: Employers are responsible for teaching their employees how to clean and disinfect their respirators and how to maintain good working order of the respirator.

Training: Comprehensive and understandable training must be provided to employees before they wear respirators and must be repeated **at least** annually. Each employee must know the proper uses, limitations, and capabilities of the respirator as well how to inspect, put on, remove, and use a respirator. Employers are also responsible to train their employees on how to recognize the medical signs that may cause a respirator to be ineffective.

Program Evaluation & Record Keeping: It is required that all employers periodically review the workplace to determine if all the regulations are being followed and that the written respiratory protection program is being implemented.

If you have any questions or concerns about this new regulation, or for a copy of the medical evaluation questionnaire, click [HERE](#) or contact us at **1-800-723-3734**.

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