The 10 Things Workers Must Understand before Using a Respirator



OHS laws require you to provide safety training and information to workers required to use respirators before they're exposed to the hazard requiring respirator use. Training must be provided by a competent person in a way that's understandable to the worker and tailored to workers' education level and the language. Simply going through the motions isn't enough. You must verify that workers have a real understanding of respirator use. More precisely, you shouldn't expose trainees to respiratory hazards unless and until they can demonstrate knowledge of 10 key things about their training:

1. Why Respirator Use Is Necessary

Training must explain the respiratory hazards workers face, what makes them dangerous and what the respirator does to protect them.

2. How Bad Fit, Use, Storage or Maintenance Hurts Effectiveness

Workers must emerge from training with an understanding that respirators aren't an automatic or self-executing solution and that their effectiveness relies on proper fit, use, storage and maintenance. Explain what can happen when a respirator doesn't fit right, gets used wrong or is badly maintained or

stored. Click here for a Model Form you can use to ensure proper fit testing of workers required to use respirators.

3. Respirator's Capabilities & Limitations

Training must explain how the particular kind of respirator the worker is expected to use actually works and the method it uses to provide protection, e.g., by filtering the air, absorbing the gas or vapor or supplying a clean source of breathing air. Also explain the equipment's limitations and what it can't be used for, e.g., that an air-purifying respirator can't be used in an atmosphere that's immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) atmosphere and the reasons why not.

4. Risk of Malfunction & Emergency

Explain the risk of respirator malfunction, the kinds of emergencies that can arise and the site's procedures for responding to each type of emergency, including how to use the respirator effectively in different emergencies.

5. Selection/Changing of Cartridges & Canisters

Upon completing training, workers must understand how cartridges and canisters contribute to the protection provided by the respirator, the different kinds of exposures they're designed to protect against and the estimated service life of cartridges and when they need to be replaced.

6. How to Put On & Remove Respirator

Trainees need to be able to show they can put the respirator on and take it off the right way so that it fits right, i.e., the way it fit during fit testing.

7. How to Inspect & Check Respirator

Workers must be trained to recognize problems that may impair the respirator's effectiveness and what to do if such problems arise, e.g., to whom they should report the problem. They also

need to know how to inspect the respirator’unless you use specialized personnel to carry out inspections’and how to perform the necessary seal checks.

8. How to Maintain & Store Respirator

Training must cover the procedures for maintaining and storing the respirator.

9. How to Recognize Medical Warning Signs

Trainees need to understand how to recognize the medical signs and symptoms that may limit or prevent them from using the respirator effectively, e.g., dizziness or shortness of breath.

10. The OHS Regulation

Training must also gain a general understanding of what the OHS regulation for respiratory protection of your jurisdiction requires, including with regard to written respiratory protection programs, medical surveillance, fit testing, etc.