

Respiratory Protection toolbox talk

A simple, 5 minute outline of what to cover in a toolbox talk on Respiratory Protection.



[Download a Respiratory Protection toolbox talk pdf](#)

Hazardous airborne contaminants can cause serious injury or death if the risks associated with breathing in the contaminants are not controlled. Health and Safety legislation requires that reasonable and practicable steps must be taken to prevent harm from breathing in hazardous airborne contaminants. Often, this involves wearing a respirator.

Why run a Respiratory Protection Toolbox Talk?

- Prevent unnecessary injury from respiratory hazards by improving awareness and training
- Assist with understanding of legislative aspects and standards
- Fewer injuries mean higher productivity

Respirator Selection

There are various types of respirators, including half-faced disposable, half-faced reusable, full-face reusable, and full head covering. Different respirators can be set up to either **filter contaminants** from air or **supply clean air** from a clean air source. The correct choice of respirator for a specific job depends on the specific airborne contaminant, the level of protection required, and comfortability of the respirator to the wearer.

The first step in selecting a respirator is to identify the airborne contaminant that is present and then to determine the level of protection required. An air supplying respirator will be necessary if the level of contaminant is above a level that is immediately dangerous to health.

Selection is complex and beyond the scope of a toolbox talk, however, the following online RPE selector tool can be used to provide a good start point:

<https://www.healthyworkinglives.scot/resources/rpe-selector-tool/Pages/default.aspx>

For further assistance seek the help of a HASANZ registered occupational hygienist.

Respirator filter selection

Respirator filters can generally be classified as either particulate filters or gas filters. Particulate filters do not filter gases and gas filters do not filter particulates. Filter manufacturers produce documents that recommend the correct filters for use with a wide array of compounds/hazardous materials. E.g.

<https://multimedia.3m.com/mws/media/6391100/3m-respirator-selection-guide.pdf>

Respirator fitting

The respirator must make a tight seal with the wearers face to be effective. **Every worker must undergo an annual fit-test** for every respirator they wear on the job, to ensure they can make a seal with the respective respirator, and to ensure the respirator is comfortable enough to the wearer, to be worn for the duration of the work.

Additionally, workers must perform a negative pressure and positive pressure self-check **every time** they don their respirator for work, to check for any leaks. Facial hair longer than 24 hours growth will break the seal and result in inadequate protection to the wearer. Other factors that can influence correct fit include, weight gain/loss, dental work, make up, and facial scars.

Maintenance and storage

To maintain the respirator in good working condition, it is important to perform regular inspections and regular cleaning of the mask.

Straps should be checked for any damage and any dirt removed using hot soapy water. Any damaged components should be repaired or replaced.

Filters have a predetermined lifetime, so it is important to follow manufacturer's instructions on when and how to replace these.

It is important to store your respirator in a sealed, cool, dry and dark place away from any oils and hazardous substances, and should be readily available to encourage use.

Key takeaways:

- *It is Important to choose the right respirator and the right filter for the job.*
- *There are many different respirators on the market, find one that fits comfortably enough to be worn for the duration of the work.*
- *It is essential the respirator makes a tight seal with the wearer's face to be effective. Facial hair will break this seal.*
- *Legislation requires workers that wear respirators for work to be fit-tested annually.*
- *Regular maintenance is necessary to keep the respirator in good working order.*
- *Respirator use should always be supported by opening windows/maintaining adequate ventilation or using extraction technology to reduce exposure as much as possible.*

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