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TOOLBOX TALK

Respiratory Protection

WHY THIS MATTERS

Over 32 million workers are exposed to chemical and toxic airborne hazards every year (OSHA). Respiratory protection is the #5 most cited OSHA standard. Workplace exposures cause 44% of asthma cases and 50% of COPD cases (CDC). You can't see what kills your lungs.

32M+
Workers exposed to airborne hazards (OSHA)

#5
Most cited OSHA standard (29 CFR 1910.134)

100%
Proper respirator use prevents lung disease

5 Rules for Respiratory Protection

Your lungs have no repair mode — once damaged, the harm is permanent:

1. **USE THE RIGHT RESPIRATOR FOR THE HAZARD**
   N95 for dust/particles. Half-face with cartridges for chemicals. SCBA for oxygen-deficient spaces. Match to hazard.
2. **FIT TEST IS MANDATORY — NO EXCEPTIONS**
   A respirator that doesn't seal is worthless. OSHA requires fit testing before first use and annually after.
3. **PERFORM A USER SEAL CHECK EVERY TIME**
   Before entering the hazard area, check positive and negative pressure seal. If air leaks — don't enter.
4. **INSPECT, CLEAN, AND STORE PROPERLY**
   Check for cracks, worn straps, damaged valves before each use. Clean after use. Store in a clean, dry place.
5. **KNOW WHEN TO CHANGE FILTERS AND CARTRIDGES**
   Replace when breathing becomes difficult, you taste/smell contaminant, or per the change schedule.

Respirator Readiness Checklist

- [ ] Has a hazard assessment identified the airborne contaminants present?
- [ ] Is the correct type of respirator selected for the identified hazard?
- [ ] Has every user been medically evaluated and fit tested?
- [ ] Do all workers know how to perform a user seal check?
- [ ] Are replacement filters/cartridges available on site?

Types of Respirators — Know Which One to Use

N95 Filtering Facepiece
Filters 95% of airborne particles (dust, mist, fume). NOT for chemicals or gases. Disposable. Most common.

Half-Face Air-Purifying (APR)
Covers nose and mouth. Uses cartridges for chemicals/gases and filters for particles. Must be fit tested.

Full-Face Air-Purifying (APR)
Covers entire face — protects eyes too. Higher protection than half-face. Used for higher concentrations.

Powered Air-Purifying (PAPR)
Battery-powered blower pushes filtered air to facepiece or hood. Easier to breathe. No fit test for loose-fitting.

Supplied-Air Respirator (SAR)
Clean air from remote source via airline. Used when air-purifying respirators are insufficient.

Self-Contained Breathing (SCBA)
Carries own air supply. Highest protection. Used in IDLH, confined spaces, and fire response.

Common Respirator Mistakes That Cause Illness

- ✗ Using a dust mask (N95) for chemical vapors — N95 filters particles only, not gases or chemicals
- ✗ Wearing a respirator over facial hair — beards break the seal. OSHA requires a clean-shaven seal area
- ✗ Skipping the seal check — if air leaks around the edges, you're breathing the contaminant directly
- ✗ Using expired or wrong cartridges — each cartridge type protects against specific hazards only

Safety Tips to Remember

- ✓ If you can smell or taste the contaminant through your respirator — leave the area and change cartridges
- ✓ Medical evaluation is required BEFORE fit testing — some conditions make respirator use unsafe
- ✓ Store respirators in sealed bags away from dust and sunlight — contaminated storage defeats the purpose
- ✓ Respirators are the LAST line of defense — engineering controls (ventilation, enclosure) come first

Discussion Questions for Your Team

1. What airborne hazards are present in our work area today?
2. Is everyone wearing the correct type of respirator for those hazards?
3. When was your last fit test and is it still current (within 12 months)?
4. Can everyone demonstrate a proper user seal check right now?
5. Where are replacement filters and cartridges stored on site?

TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-OFF

Date: _____ Supervisor: _____

Project: _____ Location: _____

Attendance sheet attached: [ ] Yes