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RESPIRATOR FIT TESTING TRAINING & ACCREDITATION | AN AIOH PROGRAM

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SILICA AND RESPIRATOR FIT TESTING (RFT)

New model WHS Regulations for the processing of crystalline silica substances

On 1st September 2024, an amendment to the Model Work Health and Safety Regulations will take effect. The amendments detail additional requirements for the processing of crystalline silica substances and aim to protect workers and others at the workplace from exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS). It is stated workers shall be provided with suitable PPE, including a program to correctly fit, instruct on use and ensure regular maintenance of respiratory protective equipment (RPE).

What is a respirator fit test?

Respirator fit testing obligations are stated in the Australia and New Zealand joint standards AS/NZS1716:2012 Respiratory Protective Devices and AS/NZS1715:2009 Selection, Use and maintenance of Respiratory Protective Devices.

Respirator Fit Testing is to determine the effectiveness of the seal of the respirator against the users face. If the respirator cannot create an adequate seal, contaminated air will leak into the respirator and wearer may not get the level of protection desired. Hence the fit testing is a very important safety protocol for workers who are wearing close fitting respirators such as disposable, half face and full-face respirators. Workers who have facial hair interfering with the seal or valve function of the respirator must not be provided with close fitting respirator as it prevents an adequate seal.

Impact of facial hair on the respirator

Close-fitting respirators must form a tight seal against the face. Any gaps in this seal allow contaminated air to enter the respirator. Respirator filters cannot clean the air that bypasses them and leaks through the face seal. Even a day or two of stubble can create enough gaps to allow contaminants to reach your lungs directly. Face seal leakage reduces the protection provided to the wearer and, in some cases, may eliminate protection entirely.

Why Fit Testing is important for any silica work?

Did you know the width of one facial hair can be up to 20 times larger than respirable crystalline silica (RCS) particle?

Airborne Contaminants like Silica Dust can range from several microns (1 micron = 1/1000th mm) down to fractions of a micron. A single hair width will hold the mask off the face and create spaces for the micron-sized particles to leak into wearers breathing zone. You can be sure that there is adequate seal by Fit Testing.

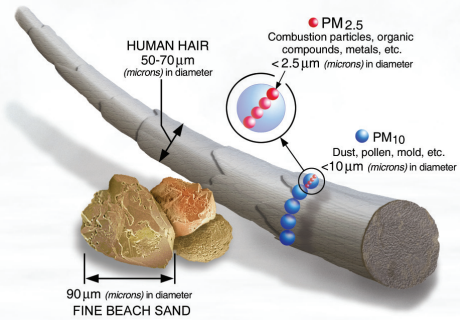
A quantitative fit test (QNFT) can measure leakage around the face seal and produces a numerical result called a "fit factor" using an instrument, providing objective and scientific result.

When should a respirator fit test be conducted?

A respirator fit test should be conducted at least annually or;

- before wearing a close-fitting respirator for the first time
- each time a new make or model of respirator is issued
- whenever there is a change in the wearer's facial characteristics or features which may affect the seal (for example, weight loss or gain, denture work)

Property Risk Australia's team of competent and accredited fit test operators can assist you with your fit test enquiries.



Please contact our team for more information. *info@propertyrisk.com.au* *(02) 9057 5150*

Book for Alexandria Fit Test here: https://www.propertyrisk.com.au/fit-testing/