

# Elements of a Respiratory Protection Program

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandates organizations to establish and maintain a respiratory protection program (RPP) with worksite-specific procedures when employees **must** wear respirators to protect against respiratory hazards. A written RPP aims to prevent employee exposure to contaminated air and avoid occupational illnesses. Organizations must appoint an RPP Manager to manage and oversee the RPP.

Work with industrial hygienists to evaluate airborne contaminants at your organization and determine employee exposure levels. You must have a written RPP when your organization requires respirator use. Include the following elements:

Element	Description
Written worksite specific procedures	Includes methods to conduct exposure assessments, identify airborne contaminants, and make reasonable employee exposure estimates
Respirator selection	States the process(es) and factors when industrial hygienists select respiratory protection in accordance with identified exposure hazards
Medical evaluations	Outlines medical evaluation procedures to determine if an employee is medically fit to wear a respirator, includes copies of medical evaluation forms and questionnaires, and discusses steps taken when follow-up evaluations are required
Fit testing	Describes the fit testing methods and procedures to ensure respirators fit well, including documentation requirements and when retesting is required
Work area surveillance	Discusses the steps to survey the workplace for stresses and exposures affecting respirator effectiveness, especially when they experience breakthrough or leakage
Inspection, cleaning, maintenance, and storage	Details the procedures for inspecting and cleaning respirators, how to properly store respirators, and how and when to perform cartridge changes
Breathing air quality	Discusses the processes in place to evaluate sources of air and certify breathing air systems
Training	Includes training topics provided to employees, the frequency of training, who is responsible for administering training, documentation requirements, and retraining requirements
Program evaluation	Explains the criteria to audit the program annually, who is responsible for completing the evaluation, and how to document the findings and issue corrective actions



## RESPIRATORY PROTECTION PROGRAM FOR VOLUNTARY USERS

Your organization may also need a written RPP if there are no hazardous exposures AND employees choose to wear respirators voluntarily. Take these actions when employees voluntarily wear respirators:



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- Work with physicians or other licensed healthcare professionals to determine if employees are medically able to use the respirator (not required for filtering facepieces)
- Provide employees with the information contained in [Appendix D, Information for Employees Using Respirators When Not Required Under the Standard](#)
- Evaluate respirator use to ensure it doesn't create a new health hazard
- Ensure respirators are cleaned (if non-disposable), stored, and maintained in a healthful manner
- Review [OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134](#) and determine if the voluntary use of your respirator requires a written RPP (not required for filtering facepieces).

## DOCUMENTATION IS KEY TO MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE RESPIRATORY PROTECTION PROGRAM

Maintaining documentation is essential to an effective RPP. Review the following suggestions to ensure your documentation is in order:

- Ensure the RPP includes written procedures to retain medical evaluations and fit testing documents and information
- Maintain copies of completed industrial hygiene surveys for employee exposures
- Inform employees their records are available upon request
- Keep copies of fit test records on file until the next fit test is performed
- Have an up-to-date copy of the RPP readily available for employee review and use
- Keep a copy of information that establishes a cartridge change schedule for cartridge and canister respirators
- Document the completion of RPP program evaluations, even if no changes were made
- Maintain records of any RPP-related training provided to supervisors and employees
- Document training reminding employees of their roles and responsibilities regarding the RPP.

For additional information on a RPP, review [OSHA Publication 3079](#) and [OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134](#).

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smcx.org/>.