Highlights of OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard, 29 CFR 1910.134

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) respiratory protection standard, 29 CFR 1910.134, establishes requirements to reduce occupational exposure and illness from airborne contaminants. Respirators are a form of personal protective equipment (PPE) and should only be used when engineering controls and work practice measures do not adequately prevent atmospheric hazards at the worksite. This one pager highlights different aspects of the respiratory protection standard.

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Selection of Respirators

Different hazards require different types of respirators (e.g., air-purifying, supplied air). It is important to evaluate workplace hazards before selecting respirators at your organization. Have a competent person (e.g., industrial hygienist, program coordinator, Respiratory Program Administrator [RPA]), conduct evaluations. Selecting a proper respirator requires these evaluations provide a reasonable estimate of employee exposure and classify the contaminant's physical form. Workplace evaluations must also identify atmospheres which are immediately dangerous to life or health (IDLH) (e.g., oxygen-deficient atmospheres).

Medical Evaluation

Evaluate an employee's ability to wear a respirator **PRIOR** to fit testing and initial use. A physician or other licensed healthcare professional (PLHCP) reviews a medical questionnaire completed by the employee and may then perform a medical examination, which could include a pulmonary function test. The PLHCP provides a written recommendation to support (or not support) an employee's ability to use a respirator, including any restrictions on respirator use. Be sure to maintain copies of any documentation received from the PLHCP.

Fit Testing

Perform fit testing **PRIOR** to initial use and on an annual basis for all for supplied air and air-purifying, tight-fitting respirators. Trained and qualified RPAs or designated employees can use either qualitative or quantitative methods to fit test an employee. Additional fit testing becomes required when an employee's physical condition (e.g., weight gain/loss, facial scarring, facial hair growth) changes and could affect respirator fit. Fit test employees with the same make, model, type, and size respirator they will use in the workplace. Maintain copies of any fit testing documentation.

Use of Respirators

Set rules and expectations for the proper use of required and voluntary respirators. Tight-fitting respirators are designed to provide a good seal; therefore, employees should not have facial hair interfering with the respirator seal. Corrective lenses and other PPE, if applicable, must not interfere with the fit of the respirator during use. Employees should perform a seal check after donning a respirator. Review 29 CFR 1910.134(c)(2)(i) requirements for voluntary respirator use.

Establish procedures for employees to leave the work area when: 1) they notice odor breakthrough while using a respirator, 2) the need to clean the respirator arises, 3) an employee notices changes in their breathing, or 4) other workplace factors appear which may affect respirator use. Train employees for emergency situations in IDLH atmospheres, too. Put these procedures in writing and communicate them to affected employees.

Maintenance and Care of Respirators

Inspect, clean, and disinfect all respirators **PRIOR** to use, and as often as necessary. Respirators must be cleaned, disinfected, and inspected before being reissued from one employee to another. Follow any manufacturer instructions on cleaning and disinfecting respirators and ensure employees store respirators in a proper manner.

Breathing Air Quality and Use

Ensure supplied breathing air meets Grade D requirements through quarterly air testing. Purchased breathing air cylinders should include a certificate of analysis from the supplier stating it meets Grade D breathing air. Place portable ambient air pumps where it will draw only clean breathing air from the surrounding environment.

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Identification of Filters, Cartridges, and Canisters

Look at all filters, cartridges, and canisters to ensure labels are legible. Develop a respirator user cartridge change out schedule for negative pressure respirator cartridges/canisters which do not utilize an end-of-service-life indicator. Incorporate specific workplace practices and work conditions when developing the schedule.

Training and Information

Provide annual and refresher training to RPA's, supervisors, and employees who use or have assigned responsibility to oversee respirator users. Document the completion of any training provided.

Program Evaluation

Conduct an annual evaluation of the written respiratory protection program to determine if all respirator program requirements are followed, effective, and fully implemented.

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