CrewSigned

Respiratory Protection Toolbox Talk

5-minute read-aloud · Last reviewed November 24, 2026

Some of what we breathe at work can make us sick for life: silica dust, welding fumes, asbestos, lead, paint and solvent vapors, mold. Our first job is to keep that stuff out of the air with water, vacuums, ventilation and better work methods. When that is not enough, a respirator is what protects your lungs. But a respirator only works when it is the right one, it fits, and you wear it correctly.

There are two main kinds. Air-purifying respirators, like filtering facepieces and half or full face masks with cartridges, clean the air you breathe. Different filters and cartridges stop different things. A particle filter stops dust and fumes but does nothing for vapors, and an organic vapor cartridge does nothing for dust. Supplied-air respirators bring clean air from a tank or a compressor and are used where the air is the most dangerous.

A dust mask that is not NIOSH approved is not a respirator. Look for the NIOSH approval on the mask or the box.

When a respirator is required, the company provides it, the training and a medical evaluation at no cost to you. You get fit tested before you use it, then every year, and any time you switch to a different model, style or size. A fit test makes sure that mask seals on your face.

Facial hair matters. Beards and stubble where the mask seals let air leak around the edge, so you breathe unfiltered air. If you wear a tight-fitting respirator, you need to be clean shaven where it seals.

Every time you put it on, do a seal check. Cover the filters and breathe in gently. The mask should pull in a little and stay there. Then cover the exhale valve and breathe out. The mask should push out slightly without leaking. If it leaks, adjust it and try again.

Before each use, check the straps, the facepiece, the valves and the cartridges. Change cartridges on the schedule we set, or sooner if breathing gets hard or you smell or taste the chemical. Clean your respirator and store it in a clean bag away from dust and sun.

If you wear a dust mask on your own when it is not required, that is fine, but tell me so we can make sure it is not hiding a bigger problem.

Discussion questions

1. Which tasks on this job require a respirator, and which type?
2. When was your last fit test, and has anything changed since then?
3. How do you do a seal check, and what does it feel like when it fails?

OSHA standard

29 CFR 1910.134, Respiratory protection
https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.134

SOURCES

OSHA Respiratory Protection: https://www.osha.gov/respiratory-protection
29 CFR 1910.134 Appendix D: Information for employees using respirators when not required: https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.134AppD
NIOSH, Respirator Types and Use: https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/ppe/respirators/index.html

This talk does not replace training that an OSHA standard requires. Scripts are based on OSHA and NIOSH publications and rewritten in plain language.

Safety Meeting Sign-In Sheet

TOPIC

Respiratory Protection Toolbox Talk

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