

Respirators and the Seal

About 10 minutes to deliver

A respirator that does not seal is a comfort object. Fit testing, the medical evaluation, facial hair, and the check you do every single time.

Air takes the easy path. If there is a gap between the mask and your face, that is where your air comes from — not through the filter.

THREE THINGS BEFORE YOU WEAR ONE

1910.134 requires all three, in this order, before a required respirator goes on your face:

- A medical evaluation. Wearing a respirator loads your heart and lungs. The questionnaire is confidential and goes to a professional, not to your supervisor.
- A fit test, on the exact make, model and size you will wear. Repeated at least annually, and again after anything that changes your face — significant weight change, dental work, facial surgery, scarring.
- Training on how to put it on, take it off, clean it, store it, and when to change the cartridges.

FACIAL HAIR

Anything that crosses the sealing surface breaks the seal. Not "mostly seals" — breaks it. Stubble a day old measurably leaks. A beard cannot be fit tested and it cannot pass a seal check, and if somebody cannot shave for a religious reason, 1910.134 expects the employer to provide a different type of respirator — a loose-fitting powered air-purifying hood, which does not rely on a seal — rather than to let them wear a mask that does not work.

THE SEAL CHECK, EVERY TIME

Ten seconds, every single time it goes on:

- Positive check: cover the exhalation valve, breathe out gently. The facepiece should bulge slightly and hold.
- Negative check: cover the cartridges, breathe in gently. It should collapse toward your face and stay there.
- If either leaks, reseal the straps and try again. If it still leaks, that mask is wrong for your face today.

THE RIGHT CARTRIDGE

A particulate filter does nothing against solvent vapour. An organic vapour cartridge does nothing against particulate. Match the cartridge to what is in the air, and change it on schedule — if you can smell or taste the contaminant, or it gets harder to breathe, you are already past due.

WHAT A RESPIRATOR CANNOT DO

None of these makes oxygen. Air-purifying respirators are useless in a confined space that is short of oxygen or in an IDLH atmosphere. That is supplied air, and it is a different plan entirely.

ASK THE CREW

- Is everyone wearing one today fit tested on that exact mask?
- Does anyone's seal check fail this morning?
- Do we know what is actually in the air, or are we guessing at the cartridge?

29 CFR 1910.134

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Respirators and the Seal

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Date

Job / site

Delivered by

Company

#	Print name	Signature	Date
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I delivered this talk and determined it was suitable for this crew and this work.

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