Facial Hair & Fit Test - Respirator Choice

Did You Know?

Employees who have a beard or facial hair are not suitable to use Negative Pressure respirators, therefore the recommended alternative is Powered Air respiratory systems.

All employees who wear tight fitting facepieces are legally required to undergo face fit testing by a competent person to ensure a proper fit and seal. A tight fitting respirator (half mask or full face mask) can only protect the wearer from contaminants if the respirator is able to achieve a good seal. Beards and facial hair will impede the ability for a face mask to acheive a good seal and will fail a face fit test.

If an employee cannot achieve a seal with a tight fitting facepiece; there are two options. The employee would either have to shave their facial hair or the employer would need to provide alternative protection. In this case the alternative would be powered air. Powered Air Respirators, when worn with loose fitting headtops, are a convenient alternative solution, allowing users to retain facial hair and high levels of protection against hazards.

Guidance from the Health & Safety Executive:

Respiratory Protective Equipment at Work (Health & Safety Executive, published 2013) sets out guidance for employers on the selection and use of Respiratory Protective Equipment to comply with the law. This includes how to select RPE and considerations which should be made, including face fit issues with facial hair:

"The wearer needs to be clean-shaven around the face seal to achieve an effective fit when using tight-fitting facepieces. If workers have beards, or are unable to be clean-shaven, a tight-fitting device will not be suitable so an appropriate loose-fitting device should be chosen."

Why Choose Powered Air?

Powered Air Respirators allow the use of a loose fitting headtop. The seal of the headtop is not affected by facial hair, therefore is suitable for workers who have beards or moustaches. A wide range of headtops are available to ensure the correct level of protection, suitable for a specific application.

Powered Air Respirators are more comfortable for wearers. The fan assisted respirators allow for more air to be delievered to the wearer, with a reduced breathing resistance which means the respirator is comfortable to use, even for full shift duration.

Did You Know?

According to HSE Guidance, all users of negative pressure should take a break at least every hour to reduce the risk of wearer fatigue. Wearing powered air respirators removes this need and so employees can work continously for longer durations.

Powered Air Respirators are cooler. Heat levels within a powered air respirator headtop are lower than using negative pressure as breath exhalation can cause heat build up within the mask. Powered air respirators are fan assisted, providing a cooling effect for wearers.

Powered Air Respirators allow for the use of multiple headtops, ensuring that the investment in one powered air respirator can be used for multiple applications, simply by changing the headtop.

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