



Tips for Achieving a Perfect Respirator Fit

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An estimated 5 million workers are required to wear respirators in 1.3 million workplaces throughout the United States, according to the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA).

Respirators are recommended by OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard to control occupational diseases caused by breathing air contaminated with harmful dusts, fogs, smokes, sprays, mists, fumes, gases or vapors.

Respirator Fit Testing

OSHA requires employers to provide Fit Testing for all employees who are *required* to wear tight-fitting facepiece respirators. To ensure the respirators provide the intended level of protection, every wearer should receive training, including demonstrations and practice time on how to properly don the respirator and determine if it fits correctly.

Fit Testing should be conducted prior to initial use of the respirator and then regularly thereafter, especially whenever a different respirator is used and whenever the wearer undergoes changes that could alter facial structure or size, such as facial surgery or significant changes in body weight. Fit Testing should not be done if the subject has any hair growth or apparel between the skin and the face seal. OSHA requirements state that all respirators to be Fit Tested shall be worn for at least five minutes before the start of the Fit Test.

There are two types of Fit Testing accepted by OSHA:

- Qualitative Fit Test – Tests an individual's ability to detect a sweet or bitter taste through a respirator.
- Quantitative Fit Test – Numerically measures the amount of leakage into a respirator.

Directions for Proper Donning

While proper donning of a respirator may feel awkward at first, it will likely become easier with repeated practice. The following donning procedures can be used with a variety of particulate respirators, but it's always important to follow the specific directions of the respirator manufacturer. These instructions should be followed each time the respirator is worn, and should be preceded by a visual inspection of the respirator to check for tears or rips.

1. Hold the respirator in your hand with head straps hanging forward over the front of the nose clip.
2. Place the respirator over your nose and mouth.
3. Place the bottom elastic strap over your head, just below your ears.
4. Untwist the strap.
5. Place the top head strap over your head, above your ears.
6. Untwist the strap.
7. Using both hands, carefully shape the nose clip to fit your nose and adjust the respirator to achieve a completely tight fit to your face.
8. Test the tightness of the facial fit by covering the front of the respirator with both hands and inhale sharply.
9. Readjust the nose clip if there are air leaks.

Common sense tells us that PPE that is not comfortable is less likely to be worn correctly. OSHA suggests that respirator comfort be evaluated with the following criteria.

- Position of the mask on the nose
- Room for eye protection
- Room to talk
- Position of the mask on face and cheeks

To ensure the respirator is providing the intended level of protection, a User Seal Check should be conducted *each time* a respirator is worn to help the wearer verify that he or she has properly donned the respirator. A User Seal Check is not a substitute for fit testing. User Seal Checks help verify proper donning, while fit testing determines which respirator fits each individual adequately.

To User Seal Check a respirator, the wearer should inhale and exhale several times. The respirator should collapse slightly when inhaling and expand slightly upon exhaling. The wearer should not feel any air leaking between his or her face and the respirator. If air is leaking out between the wearer's face and the respirator, then this is NOT a good facial fit. (See OSHA's User Seal Check Procedures for more details.)

If the wearer is having a problem successfully User Seal Checking the respirator, he or she should try the following tips:

- Use a mirror while adjusting the respirator.
- Ask someone to look for hair or earrings that might be caught in the seal.
- Make sure the headbands are positioned properly. It is especially important that the top headband is on the crown of your head, as it is designed to hold the bottom of the respirator snug against your chin.

Replacement respirators should be readily available for employees who determine or suspect that their respirators are damaged or contaminated, which may happen if the respirator is donned or removed several times. Users should NOT proceed with work activities until they have *successfully* user seal checked their respirator.

Tips for Respirator Selection

When selecting respirators, it is important to look for comfort features that encourage all-day wear, such as:

- Soft, foam nose pads.
- Head straps without staples, which hold respirators securely in place without pulling or breaking.

Also look for respirators with highly visible color-coded straps and valves, indicating the level of protection. These can help safety managers determine from a distance if employees are using the correct respirators for a given task.

