

Optional Respirators: You Need a Program

By Miles Free, Director of Industry Research and Technology, PMPA :: mfree@pmpa.org

An employer may provide respirators and dust masks at the request of employees, even when they are not required. Employees may choose to wear a respirator to avoid exposure to nuisances or hazards even though the nuisance or hazard does not exceed the limits set by OSHA standards. In such circumstances, respirators or dust masks can provide an additional level of comfort and protection for the employees. However, it is incumbent upon the employer to assure that the respirator and its use do

not become a hazard to the employee.

If the employer determines that the voluntary use of the respirator is permissible and does not itself present a hazard, the employer still has an obligation to provide

“...respirators or dust masks can provide an additional level of comfort and protection for the employees.”

those using the respirators with the information contained in Appendix D of 1910.134 titled, “Information for Employees Using Respirators When Not Required Under the Standard.”

The employer must also establish and implement the elements of a written respiratory protection program necessary to assure that any employee using a respirator



IN THIS ISSUE

- **Optional Respirators: You Need a Program**
- **PMPA Member Chase Brass Focuses on Common Interests and Big Picture Strategies**
- **Free Freight Analysis**
- **Craftsman’s Cribsheet: Quality**
- **PMPA Calendar**

voluntarily is medically able to use the respirator, and that the respirator is cleaned, stored and maintained so that its use does not present a health hazard to the user. For employers whose employees’ only use of respirators involves dust masks (filtering face pieces), no such written program is required.

As with any safety program, the employer needs to designate a program administrator who is qualified by training for the complexity of the program to be administered. The program oversight must include evaluations to determine program effectiveness.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 17

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Optional Respirators: You Need a Program

Here are five responsibilities for employees who choose to wear optional respiratory protection/dust masks:

1. Read and heed all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, as well as warnings regarding the respirator's limitations.
2. Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern. NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, certifies respirators. A label or statement of certification should appear on the respirator or respirator packaging. The label will tell you what the respirator is designed for and what protection it offers.
3. Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors or very small solid particles of fumes or smoke.

4. Do not make the mistake of believing that a respirator provides oxygen. Respirators' and dust masks' sole function is to filter out impurities from air. They DO NOT generate oxygen that is not already present in the atmosphere.

5. Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.

As an employer, in addition to providing the respirator or dust mask, you need to have a written program, and you need to train your employees about these requirements. The employer shall provide respirators, training and medical evaluations at no cost to the employee.

For more information, please see 1910.134(c)(2) or visit this link: www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owa-disp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=12716



YOUR career FACTS

The blog, YourCareerFacts.com, shows how to find a way to earn while learning and find a rewarding career in precision machining through informative articles and success stories. It is a valuable resource for anyone wanting to learn more about education, training and career opportunities in the industry.

Visit YourCareerFacts.com.