PPE: Respiratory – Safety Checklist



Respiratory hazards are invisible and can have severe impact on the health and safety of a worker. A respiratory hazard can be a particulate, gas or vapor, and include airborne contaminants, biological contaminants, dusts, mists, fumes, and gases, or oxygen-deficient atmospheres. Some respiratory health problems have long-term consequences and dramatically reduce quality of living due to difficulty-breathing.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as respirators, are equipment worn by workers to minimize exposure to the occupational hazards of chemical, biological and other airborne substances. A hazard cannot be eliminated by the PPE, but the risk of injury can be reduced.

PREVENTION

An estimated 5 million workers are required to wear respirators in 1.3 million workplaces throughout the United States, according to OSHA. Knowing what the agency requires for respirator use in the workplace, as well as having a thorough understanding of both the application and contaminants present are critical to the respiratory protection selection process.

To understand the information that’s needed and its importance will ensure the safety of the respirator user while expediting the selection experience. Knowing where to turn for help can make the selection process less daunting for safety professionals faced with respiratory protection options.

The Hierarchy

A thorough an understanding of OSHA’s hierarchy of hazard control measures is in order. From the agency’s perspective, personal protective equipment (PPE) is the last option for an employer seeking to prevent employee exposure to a contaminant. OSHA’s hierarchy of control measures, in order, is:

- Elimination/substitution
- Engineering controls
- Administrative and work practice controls
- PPE

When it comes to respiratory hazards, elimination/substitution means phasing out the contaminant or substituting a non-hazardous material for the contaminant causing the concern. Examples of engineering controls include the isolation or dilution of the contaminant through the use of a fume hood or ventilation.

Administrative and work practice controls could encompass rotating multiple workers through a job where contaminates are present to reduce individual exposure levels.

Cautionary

A respirator only becomes an option if the preceding control methods are infeasible or if they fail to reduce exposures to acceptable levels. Respirators also could be used in the interim while the other control measures are being implemented.

Respiratory Prevention Program

After a safety manager has done his/her due diligence in working through the hierarchy of controls, and it’s determined that Respiratory Protection is going to be part of their exposure control plan, the employer will need to implement a Respiratory Protection Program as defined by OSHA in 29 CFR 1910.134(A).**The Respiratory Protection Program** is a written collection of work-site specific procedures and policies that…