

Respiratory Protection

Revised July 2024

Purpose

[WAC 296-842 Respirators](#)

District employees in certain jobs are or can be exposed to hazards that require the use of a respirator. The respiratory protection program is to ensure these employees are properly trained and protected from the exposure to these hazards.

The primary goal of this program is to provide detailed instruction in the proper selection, use and maintenance of a respirator. The following are key points in the District's Respiratory Protection Program:

- A clear description of the hazards and the degree of protection required
- The selection of the respirator
- Medical evaluation for respirator users
- Fitting of the respirator
- The implementation of a maintenance program
- The written procedures covering routine, infrequent and/or emergency procedures
- The required training in the correct use and care of the respirator
- Respirator program evaluation

A complete copy of the District's Respiratory Protection Program can be found in the Safety Department.

Engineering controls such as ventilation and substitution of less toxic materials are the first line of defense. However, engineering controls have not always been feasible for some of our operations or have not always completely controlled the identified hazards. In these situations, respirators and other protective equipment must be used. Respirators are also utilized for protection during emergencies.

Applicability

This program applies to all employees required to wear respirators during normal work operations and during certain non-routine or emergency operations. Employees participating in the Respiratory Protection Program do so at no cost to the employee. The expense associated with medical evaluations, training, and respiratory protection equipment will be paid by the District.

The Program Administrator (Safety Department) or designee must approve ALL District employee use of any type of respirator while at work.

Employees who voluntarily choose to use a cartridge-style respirator when the respirator is not required are subject to the medical evaluation, cleaning, and maintenance and storage elements of this program. These employees will also receive training covering proper procedures for cleaning, maintenance and storage of their respirators. In addition, the information specified in Appendix A: Important Information about Voluntary Use of Respirators will be provided to all voluntary users of respirators.

Employees who voluntarily choose to use a filtering face piece respirator (i.e., a dust-mask style respirator) are excluded from the requirements of this program.

Voluntary use does not require the District to pay for respirators, but program costs (e.g., medical evaluations when a cartridge-style respirator is used) are the responsibility of the District.

Responsibilities

Respirator Program Administrator (Safety Department)

The Respirator Program Administrator is responsible for overseeing the Respiratory Protection Program and to conduct the required evaluations of program effectiveness to ensure that the requirements of this program are implemented. The Senior Manager of Safety or his/her designee is the program administrator.

Oversight of the program administrator includes:

- Identifying work areas, processes or tasks that require workers to wear respirators, and evaluating hazards
- Selection of respiratory protection options
- Monitoring respirator use to ensure respirators are used in accordance with their certifications
- Arranging for and/or conducting training
- Ensuring proper storage and maintenance of respiratory protection equipment
- Conducting qualitative/quantitative fit testing
- Administering the medical surveillance program
- Maintaining records required by the program
- Evaluating the program
- Updating the written program as necessary to reflect workplace changes that affect respirator use, [WAC 296-842-12005 Develop and maintain a written program](#)

Manager Responsibilities

Managers are responsible for ensuring the Respiratory Protection Program is implemented in their area. In addition to being knowledgeable about the program requirements for their own protection, managers must also ensure the program is understood and followed by the employees under their charge.

Duties of the manager include:

- Ensuring that employees under his/her supervision (including new hires) have received appropriate training, fit testing, and medical evaluation
- Ensuring the availability of appropriate respirators and accessories
- Being aware of tasks requiring the use of respiratory protection
- Enforcing the proper use of respiratory protection when necessary
- Ensuring that respirators are properly cleaned, maintained and stored according to the Respiratory Protection Plan
- Ensuring respirators fit well and do not cause discomfort
- Continually monitoring work areas and operations to identify changes in respiratory hazards
- Coordinating with the program administrator on how to address respiratory hazards or other concerns regarding the program

Employees

Each employee has the responsibility to wear their respirator when and where required and in the manner in which trained.

Employees must also:

- Care for and maintain their respirators as instructed and store them in a clean and sanitary location.
- Inform their manager or program administrator if the respirator no longer fits well and request a new one that fits properly.
- Inform their manager or program administrator of any respiratory hazards that they feel is not adequately addressed in the workplace and of any other concerns regarding the program.
- Notify their manager or the program administrator of any other problems associated with using their respirator.

Respirator Selection

The program administrator is responsible for ensuring the respirator selected will effectively reduce exposure to the employee under all conditions of use, including reasonably foreseeable emergency situations.

Proper respirator selection involves choosing a device that provides protection from the respiratory hazards to which the employee may be exposed and permits them to perform with the least amount of physical burden.

Interchanging of respirator parts (e.g. cartridges or airline hoses) between different manufacturer's respirators or different respirators models made by the same manufacturer shall not be done without the program administrator or designee approval.

Medical Evaluation

Employees whose job duties could require the use of respirators must be physically able to perform the tasks while using the respirator. Accordingly, the District has the responsibility of ensuring employees are medically fit and able to tolerate the physical and psychological stress imposed by respirator use, as well as the physical stress originating from job and workplace conditions. Employees will not be allowed to wear respirators until a physician or other licensed health care professional (PLHCP) has determined that they are medically able to do so.

Any employee refusing the medical evaluation cannot work in an area requiring respirator use.

Employees voluntarily using filtering face piece respirators (dust masks) and employees using loose fitting escape-only respirators (provided that is the only respirator used) are exempt from the requirements of a medical evaluation.

Medical Questionnaire Administration

Employees assigned to tasks requiring the use of respirators will be required to complete the "WISHA Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire" (WAC 296-842 Respirators). The program administrator or their designee will make available a copy of the questionnaire to all employees requiring medical evaluations. The written medical evaluation will be administered confidentially and during working hours at a place on site that is convenient to employees.

Physician or Licensed Health Care Professional's (PLHCP) Written Recommendations

The District will obtain documentation from the PLHCP confirming the employee is medically able to wear a respirator. Documentation must include any limitations on the employee's use of the respirator, as well as requirements for periodic or future medical evaluations.

Fit Testing

[WAC 296-842-15005 Conduct fit testing](#)

[WAC 296-842-22010 Follow these fit-testing procedures for tight-fitting respirators](#)

To obtain adequate respiratory protection, there must be a proper match between the respirator seal and wearer's face. Respirators that don't seal properly around the face offer only the illusion of protection.

The primary purpose of fit testing is to identify the specific make, model, style, and size of respirator best suited for each employee. In addition, fit testing provides an opportunity to check on problems with respirator wearers and reinforces respirator training by having wearers review the proper methods of donning and wearing the respirator.

The Safety department will conduct fit testing. It has been determined that employee exposures will not exceed airborne concentrations in excess of ten (10) times the Permissible Exposure Limit (PLE), therefore, qualitative fit tests can be conducted on all negative-pressure respirators. If conditions affecting exposure levels change, the Safety designee will evaluate whether quantitative fit testing is required.

Corrective glasses, goggles or other personal protective equipment must be worn in such a way that the seal of the face piece is not negatively affected. Full-face-piece respirators will be provided where either corrective glasses or eye protection is required, since corrective lenses can be mounted inside a full-face respirator. The use of contact lenses with respirators where the wearer has successfully worn such lenses before will be allowed.

A user seal check will be performed every time a tight-fitting respirator is put on or adjusted to ensure proper seating of the respirator to the face. The user seal check conducted must be either the positive and/or negative pressure checks described in [WAC 296-842-22020 Follow procedures established for seal checking respirators](#) or the manufacturer's recommended procedures when equally protective. The manufacturer's check procedure should be kept with respirator.

Employees who voluntarily chose to use air-purifying respirators are not required to be fit tested.

Maintenance and Care

The program administrator or their designee will oversee the maintenance and care of this program.

The standard requires the District provide each respirator user with a respirator that is clean, sanitary, and in good working order. These requirements are a vital part of any successful respiratory protection program.

To ensure the respirator remains serviceable and delivers effective protection, employees must be trained in the maintenance and care of the respirator.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

[WAC 296-842-22015 Follow procedures established for cleaning and disinfecting respirators](#)

Respirators will be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with WAC 296-842.

In addition to WAC 296-842:

- Respirators issued for the exclusive use of an employee will be cleaned and disinfected as often as necessary to be maintained in a sanitary condition. Employees will be responsible to clean and disinfect respirators issued for their exclusive use.
- Respirators used by more than one employee will be cleaned and disinfected prior to being used by a different employee.
- Respirators maintained for emergency use as well as respirators used in fit testing and training will be cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- During fit-tests, disinfectant wipes can be used in between respirator wears to minimize the risk for spreading cold, influenza or other respiratory illness. **Note: The person cleaning respirators with disinfectant wipes must be so trained.** At the end of the day, each respirator will be completely disassembled and cleaned by immersion.

Storage

[WAC 296-842-17010 Store respirators properly](#)

Respirators will be stored so they are protected against damage, contamination, dust, sunlight, temperature extremes, excessive moisture, and damaging chemicals. When respirators are packed or stored, the face piece and exhalation valve will be stored in a manner preventing deformation. Each respirator should be positioned to retain its natural configuration.

Inspection

[WAC 296-842-17015 Inspect and repair respirators](#)

Respirators used in routine situations will be inspected before each use and during cleaning.

To ensure continued reliability, respiratory equipment must be inspected on a regular basis. The frequency of inspection and the procedures to be followed depend on whether the respirator is intended for non-emergency, emergency, or escape use only.

Respirators designated for use in an emergency will be inspected at least monthly and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and checked for proper function before and after each use. Emergency escape-only respirators must be inspected before being carried into the workplace.

Repair

The program administrator or designee will ensure respirators that fail to pass inspection or are otherwise found to be defective will be removed from service and repaired or adjusted properly. If a respirator cannot be

repaired or adjusted, it will be discarded.

Repairs or adjustments to respirators will be done by an outside company. Only NIOSH-approved manufacturer's replacement parts designed for that respirator will be used. Repairs will be made in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations and specifications regarding the type and extent of repairs to be performed.

Training

Employee training is an important part of the Respiratory Protection Program and is essential for correct respirator use. The WISHA respiratory protection standard requires the District to provide training before the employee uses a respirator in the workplace. The District requires this training annually and for all new employees prior to working when a respirator is required. For the training to be effective, the training information must be comprehensive and presented in an understandable way.

Employees will demonstrate their understanding of the information covered in the training through hands-on exercises or a written test. The program administrator will document respirator training and the documentation will include the type, model, and size of respirator for which each employee has been trained and fit tested.

This training is available in Learning Central and can be assigned to employee Learning Plans.