



Controlling exposures to prevent occupational lung disease

Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) Guidance 1/5

1. Selection and procurement



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If you have determined that RPE is required, you need to ensure that it is:

Adequate correct for the risk

Suitable matched to the wearer, the task and the environment

What is meant by 'adequate'?

You need to select the right type of RPE for the risk. Choose a type that has a sufficient level of performance to reduce exposure to an acceptable level.

Exposure levels for different hazards are set by Safe Work Australia, www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/.

There are many types of contaminants that workers can be exposed to and which require the use of respiratory protection. The filter you need will depend on the contaminant - there isn't one type that can be used for all contaminants.

Types of RPE

There are two main types of RPE: filter respirators and air supplied respirators.

Filter Respirators

Filter respirators can be disposable or reusable and are the most commonly used in everyday work situations. They usually have a choice of filters for use against different hazards. Filters are certified to different classes depending on their efficiency or capacity, and you will need to ensure you select the right class.



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Air Supplied Respirators

Air supplied respirators consist of breathing apparatus which supply air from an independent source, such as a cylinder or air compressor. These can be used against a wider range of airborne hazards and in different atmospheres.



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What is meant by 'suitable'?

RPE has to be suitable for the person using it to provide the required protection.

Some key points

- Any type of respirator which relies on a seal against the face (known as 'tight fitting') is required to be **fit tested**  This means you will need to select more than one model or size of the required type to ensure all individuals can achieve an efficient fit.



- The selected RPE must be appropriate for individual needs, such as spectacle wearing. In addition, it should not interfere with the job function or with any other safety equipment, such as personal protective equipment (PPE) being worn, e.g. safety helmets or goggles.



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- Finally, it should be suitable for the environment it is intended to be used in, such as in confined spaces.



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Involving your workforce in the selection process will help ensure they 'buy in' to the products selected.

The Healthy Working Lives **RPE selector tool**  is a useful resource in selecting RPE.

Procurement

Obviously, a key role of any procurement function is to get the best value for money when buying supplies, and this will include health and safety equipment.

It is essential that you brief the person responsible for purchasing the RPE to equip them with all the relevant information and knowledge to choose between the RPE you have selected, based on all the above points. If you don't, the risk is that they may buy something which is less expensive and looks the same – but isn't, in fact, suitable or adequate.

It's worth remembering that a good health and safety programme is good for business. RPE that is not actually protecting the wearer is a waste of money and is likely to result in significant harm to your workers' health.