

WEARING RESPIRATORY PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (RPE)

All Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBUs) are required to supply 'fit for purpose' RPE to workers carrying out tasks in dusty environments.

As charcoal dust particles are very small, workers should use a tight-fitting respirator with an effective face seal. This means they need to be clean-shaven or only have facial hair that does not interfere with the fitting surfaces or the respirator valve. As everyone's face is a different size and shape, there is no 'one size fits all' tight-fitting respirator. This means that you should also fit test each worker and their RPE before they undertake dusty work.

For workers who want to keep facial hair that may interfere with the operation or proper fit of a tight-fitting respirator (for example a closely trimmed beard), a powered air-purifying respirator with a loose hood may be suitable.

FIT TESTING RPE

Fit testing measures the effectiveness of the seal between the respirator and the wearer's face. Workers should pass a respirator fit test before they first start wearing any respirator including:

- Half face disposable.
- Half face reusable.
- Full face reusable.
- Tight-fitting Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPR).

There are two types of fit testing that can be carried out:

- Qualitative (only used on half-face respirators):
 - A pass/fail test that relies on the wearer's ability to taste or smell a test agent.
- Quantitative (can be used on all respirators and PAPR):
 - Uses specialised equipment to measure how much air leaks into the respirator.

Quantitative fit testing results are more objective than qualitative testing because some workers have difficulty with their ability to taste or smell. This can result in a 'false pass' and worker health may not be adequately protected.

It is recommended that full-face respirators and PAPR are fit tested using the quantitative method.

All fit testing must be carried out by a competent person, manufacturer, supplier or consultant:

- Before a worker wears a respirator for the first time.
- Each time a new make or model of respirator is provided to a worker.
- Whenever there is a change in the wearer's facial characteristics or features that may affect the seal, for example, large weight loss or gain.

Fit testing should be repeated on a regular basis and based upon the outcomes of a risk assessment, for example, every one or two years.

For your own benefit you will need to keep a written record of fit tests carried out for each worker including the:

- Type of test performed.
- Make, model, style and size of respirator tested.
- Date and result of the test.
- Dates when work was carried out in a dusty environment.

Issue your workers with a fit test record card after fit testing.