

Safety Alert

Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) & Face Fit Testing

Details

A recent visit by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) resulted in a Fee for Intervention charge relating to the issue and use of Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE). They highlighted the need for RPE, more commonly known as dust masks, to be suitable for the type of exposure and most importantly for the equipment to be worn correctly. For RPE to be suitable it must be matched to the job, the environment, the anticipated airborne contaminant exposure level, and the wearer. As people come in all sorts of shapes and sizes it is unlikely that one particular type, or size of RPE face piece, will fit everyone. Fit testing will help ensure that the equipment selected is suitable for the wearer.

Face Fit Testing involves the individual wearing a mask for a series of tests to determine if the equipment leaks. For the test to be carried out individuals need to be clean shaven and a number of tests may need to be undertaken to determine the best type of mask for that person.

Once a person has been Face Fit Tested they must then be issued with and use the type of mask for which they were tested. They must be advised that should they wear the mask other than when clean shaven that it will not protect them. For persons who choose to have facial hair then alternative arrangements may have to be considered such as full face powered respirators.

There are two types of testing which needs to be carried out by a suitably accredited organisation/person.

Quantitative Face fit testing

Who needs Quantitative Face Fit Tested?

- Any person who wears a full-face self-contained respiratory mask.
- This includes breathing apparatus.
- The test is undertaken using a partacount machine, which measures the number of ambient particles inside and outside a facepiece, ensuring that the mask is correctly fitted and provides a tight seal around the wearers face.

Qualitative Face Fit Testing

Who needs Qualitative Face Fit Tested?

- Any employee who wears a half-face mask. The test is undertaken using a hood and a non-toxic test agent. During a set of verbal and physical exercises, the wearer's sense of taste and smell is used to detect any leakage that may occur while wearing their mask.
- Some half-face masks may also require a quantitative face fit test.

Points to consider:

Have the areas/processes generating dust been controlled as far as reasonably practicable to reduce the potential for exposure? Can the need for people to enter dusty environments be eliminated?

Have risk assessments determined the need for RPE to be worn in particular areas and/or for particular tasks? Have the risk assessments determined the level of protection needed?

Have the persons required to wear RPE been Face Fit Tested? Are the masks for which they were tested made readily available? Have users been trained in how to fit and use the masks correctly? Are they being worn as required? (Editors note: Is the RPE being maintained and stored correctly?).

For Face Fit Testing, contact your normal Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provider.

Further Information: <http://www.fit2fit.org/index.html> and <http://www.hse.gov.uk>

