



Weekly Safety Meeting

Respiratory Protective Equipment Storage

In many industrial workplaces, people must work in areas where different substances can be present, some hazardous to their health. There are facilities where the level of oxygen and the number of toxic substances in the air could change at any time. These substances could create health hazards that cause different effects to the lungs and other parts of the body, causing disease, and in extreme cases, death. In some workplaces, management may have exhausted ways to control exposures to toxic substances (using the Hierarchy of Controls, for example - Elimination, Substitution, Administrative, Engineering Controls, PPE).

When engineering controls are not feasible, or while they are being instituted, the Occupational Safety and Health Respiratory Standard (29 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) 1910.134) would require the use of respirators to protect employees from breathing contaminated and/or oxygen-deficient air. Respiratory protection devices are the last line of defense.

Respiratory Protective Equipment is thus very important and must function properly when employees must use it.

What Is the Proper Way to Store a Respirator That is Used Routinely?

Before storing a respirator, the proper maintenance and care must be provided. Employers must provide that maintenance and care. This requires the employer to provide cleaning and disinfecting, storage, inspection, and repair of respirators used by employees according to the procedures described in 29 CFR 1910.134.

The employer shall provide each respirator user with a respirator that is clean, sanitary and in good working order. The employer shall ensure that respirators are cleaned and disinfected using the procedures described in Appendix B-2 of the 1910.134., or procedures recommended by the respirator manufacturer, provided that such procedures are of equivalent effectiveness.

Respirators are cleaned and disinfected at specific intervals. When used exclusively by one employee, cleaning and disinfecting is done as often as necessary to maintain a sanitary condition. When used by more than one employee, a respirator must be cleaned and disinfected after each use.

Respirators must be stored to protect them from damage, contamination, dust, sunlight, extreme temperatures, excessive moisture, and damaging chemicals. They must be packed or stored to prevent deformation of the facepiece and exhalation valve, for example, placing them in individual storage bins. Respirator facepieces can become distorted and the straps lose elasticity from hanging them on a peg or object for a long time. Check for these problems before each use.

Storing the respirator in something like a “Ziploc” plastic sealable bag is not considered a good practice, after use. The respirator may still be damp after use and sealing it in a plastic bag prevents drying and encourages microbial growth. A nonporous, sturdy, airtight container, or sealable plastic bags are suggested after respirators are allowed to be completely dry.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Respirator Fact Sheet, presented by the National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory, reminds us that cartridges/filters that contain charcoal or other chemicals for filtering the air should be in airtight packages. Manufacturers provide cartridges/filters in airtight packaging. If cartridges/filter packaging are open (exposing them to potential moisture/contamination) or not packed in airtight packaging, they should not be used. Even cartridges in original packaging have expiration dates that should be checked before purchase. If the filter cartridges that attach to the respirator mask are outdated, have been open to the air, “used up” or are damaged, the respirators are ineffective. Store cartridges/filter in separate airtight packaging, separate from respirator.

Respirators used for emergencies must be accessible from the work area and stored in compartments or in covers that are clearly marked as containing emergency respirators. These respirators are to be stored in accordance with any applicable manufacturer instructions.

Summary:

We must take respiratory protection equipment seriously. Improper care, maintenance, and storage could lead to failure of equipment and worse, personal injury or death. Remember, the care of this equipment affects the wearer.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR RESPIRATOR...IT CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE!

