

Respiratory Protection

Checking the Fit

Choosing the right respirator for your workplace may be an easy task—most likely, your employer has made that decision for you. But only you can make sure your respirator fits properly. And if it doesn't fit, you might as well not wear it at all.

Making It Fit

All respirators have one thing in common: they work best if (and some work only if) they fit snugly to your face. Whether you use a full-face respirator or one that covers only your nose and mouth, choose a respirator that's the right size for you and feels comfortable. Do not try to make a respirator more comfortable or better fitting by altering it in any way or repairing it with parts from another respirator. Follow instructions for putting it on, adjusting the straps if necessary. When a respirator fits properly, the soft, pliable edges of the mask will mold to form a seal to your face, preventing contaminated air from entering. Adjust disposable fiber masks by pinching the metal nose strip to fit around your nose. If you wear glasses with a full-face mask respirator, you may need a specially modified model. (Contact lenses should not be worn with a respirator since pressure changes can pull them off your eyes.)

Causes of Leaks

What if your respirator fails the tests? Check the respirator for cracks or hardening that may prevent a tight seal. In addition, make sure no hair sticks out from under the edges of the face mask. Beards, mustaches and long sideburns will interfere with the seal.

Be Aware

As you work, be alert to any changes

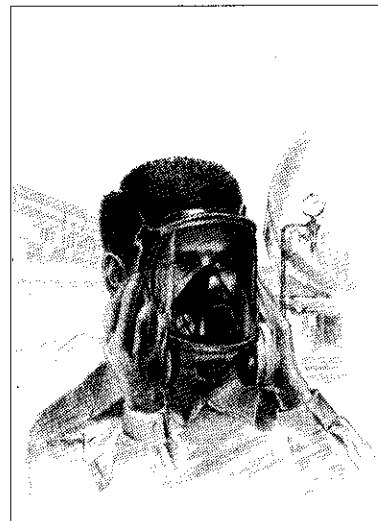
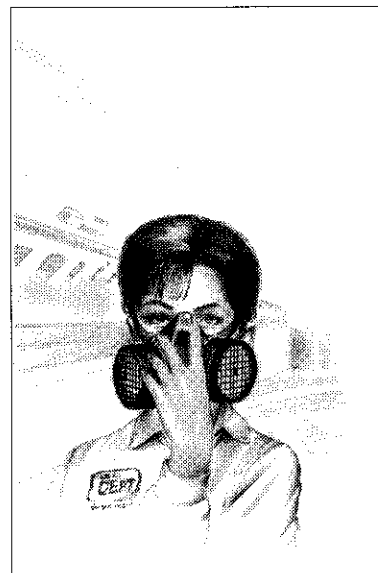
Testing the Fit

CHECK THE MASK'S SEAL IN THE FOLLOWING TWO WAYS:

1. Positive pressure test: Cover the exhalation valve so that air cannot escape through it; then exhale gently. The mask will bulge, and you should feel increased air pressure until you inhale or uncover the valve. This means that no air is escaping the mask.

2. Negative pressure test: Cover the air intake ports of the respirator with your palms and inhale. Not only should it be difficult to inhale, but the soft parts of the respirator should collapse inward toward your face and remain that way as long as you are inhaling. This means that no air is getting into the mask from the edges. If you feel air coming in and the mask regains its shape, there is a leak that must be corrected before you use the respirator.

Perform these tests each time you use your respirator, and enter your work area only if your respirator passes them. Some employers provide a test atmosphere of banana oil or irritating smoke: If your mask is leaking, you will detect an odor or irritation.



in the air you breathe. If you suddenly notice an unusual taste, smell, irritation or warming of the air you inhale, or if breathing becomes difficult, get out of the hazardous area immediately and do the pressure tests. If pressure is maintained, you may need to change the filter or cartridge on your air-pu-

rifying respirator or check the air supply of your supplied-air respirator. But, remember that not all hazardous substances cause odor or irritation. The best way to avoid contamination is to test your respirator's fit regularly, whether you notice a change or not.