



Facial hair and respiratory protection

Workers must take all necessary steps to ensure the proper fit and use of respirators. When wearing tight-fitting respirators, workers must ensure an effective face seal. This means being clean-shaven or only having facial hair that doesn't interfere with the fitting surfaces and the valve of the respirator.

For workers who want to keep facial hair that may interfere with the operation or proper fit of tight-fitting respirators, a powered air purifying respirator with a loose hood will provide the protection needed.

What to expect from an inspector

Inspectors will take enforcement action where a person conducting a business or undertaking has provided tight-fitting respirators to workers without undertaking fit-testing and/or facial hair is likely to prevent the seal of the respirator to the face.



Fit-testing requirements for tight-fitting respirators

Many common types of respirators are tight-fitting where performance relies on a good seal between the respirator and the wearer's face.

If there isn't a good seal, contaminated air will leak into the respirator and the wearer may not get the level of protection that is needed to protect their health.



Note: Everyone's face is a different size and shape so there is no 'one size fits all'.

Workers must pass a respirator fit-test before they first start wearing a tight-fitting respirator. Fit-testing measures the effectiveness of the seal between the respirator and the wearer's face. It is required for all tight-fitting respirators, including:

- half-face disposable
- half-face reusable
- full-face reusable
- tight-fitting powered air purifying respirators (PAPR).

There are two methods of fit-testing that meet AS/NZS1715:2009 Selection, use and maintenance of respiratory protective equipment:

- Qualitative – a pass/fail test that relies on the wearer's ability to taste or smell a test agent. This type of test can only be used on half-face respirators.
- Quantitative – uses specialised equipment to measure how much air leaks into the respirator. This type of test can be used on half-face respirators, full-face respirators and PAPR.

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 potential for a false pass to the qualitative fit-test and worker health not being adequately protected.

Full-face respirators and PAPR must be fit-tested using the quantitative method.

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

- before wearing a tight-fitting respirator for the first time
- each time a new make or model of respirator is issued
- whenever there is a change in the wearer's facial characteristics or features which may affect the facial seal (e.g. large weight loss or gain)
- at least annually.



Note: Facial hair that lies along the sealing surface of a tight-fitting respirator will stop it sealing properly. Fit-testing must be carried out on males who are clean-shaven or have no hair between their face and the fitting surfaces of the respirator face piece.

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.

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

For more information visit:

- www.standards.org.au and search **AS/NZS 1715**
- www.worksafe.qld.gov.au and search **respiratory protective equipment**



Fit-checking is a quick check to ensure the respirator, which has already been fit-tested, has been properly positioned on the face and there is a good seal between the respirator and face. Each time a tight-fitting respirator is put on, the wearer should carry out a fit check, following the manufacturer's instructions. A fit-check does not replace the need for a fit-test.