

Is it necessary to be fit tested for all your respirators, including disposables?

The short answer is YES - for all tight-fitting respirators.

Respirators that rely on a tight seal against the face must be fit tested for the workers who will wear them. This includes disposable respirators, half-face and full-face respirators including those that are part of a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR) or air fed respirator system where a tight-fitting respirator is used, even though they might be used in positive pressure mode.

It is not necessary to fit test workers for each individual disposable respirator, but once a worker has passed a fit test for a particular make, model and size of disposable respirator, the business should keep an adequate supply of that model in stock for those workers who need to use them. The requirement for fit testing is covered in the standards AS/NZS1715:2009 and AS/NZS/ISO 16975.3:2003. Regulation 17 of the *Health and Safety at Work (General Risk and Workplace Management) Regulations 2016* outlines the legislative requirement that personal protective equipment must be of a suitable size and fit, and that it must be reasonably comfortable for the worker to wear or use. Fit testing is the only way Fit-Test New Zealand is aware of, that a business can meet its statutory obligations.

Loose-fitting hood and helmet respirators used with a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR) do not need to be fit tested, because they do not rely on a seal between the face and respirator to work. This type of respirator can be used by workers who have facial hair. They are also more comfortable to wear, because pre-filtered air is supplied to the worker eliminating the need to overcome the resistance of breathing through a filter. Additionally, PAPR units can provide a cooling effect as the filtered air blows across the face. However tight-fitting respirators used with a PAPR must be fit tested, as discussed below.

What about tight-fitting respirators connected to a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR) system?

Workers using tight-fitting respirators that are used as a part of a PAPR system that includes a loose-fitting headpiece do need to be fit tested for their tight-fitting respirators.

For fit-testing to take place, tight-fitting respirators must be temporarily converted to negative pressure mode (or a subrogate negative pressure respirator of the same design and with equivalent sealing surface should be used to conduct the fit test). Frequency of fit testing should be as per AS/NZS or ISO standards for any tight-fitting respirators: prior to first use, annually and sooner if there are any changes in the facial characteristics of the wearer.

What about the Singh Thatta Technique?

This technique relies on an elastic band being worn around the wearer's beard in an attempt to create a smooth surface for the respirator to seal against. The reasons a wearer might wish to use this method, and retain their beard, might be religious or medical in nature, or simply that they just do not wish to shave their beard off. Commit2Fit has advised that although some studies have been undertaken and published, there are substantial limitations on the data collected and they have not been fully reviewed. The current respiratory protection standards (AS/NZS1715:2009, ISO 16975-3,

OSHA 1910.134 and others) are very clear about the need for no interference between the seal of the tight-fitting respirator and the face of the wearer.

Until such time as Commit2Fit changes its stance, Fit-Test New Zealand will not conduct fit testing of respiratory protective equipment where the Singh Thatta technique is used.

For workers who choose, for whatever reason, to retain facial hair that would otherwise come between their respirator and their face, the only respirator option is a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR) system with a loose-fitting headpiece. These systems do not require fit testing and the user may choose to have facial hair and still receive adequate protection.

Fit-Test New Zealand

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