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Docket Office, Docket H-049
U.S. Department of Labor
Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Room N2625
200 Constitution Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20210

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OSHA
DOCKET OFFICER
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Subject: Comments on Respiratory Protection Proposed Rule (*Federal Register*: Nov. 15, 1994).

Appendix A, Paragraph II.C.4.(h) requiring multiple quantitative fit tests

The subject multiple test requirement provides no additional protection when an appropriate safety factor is used; the maximum use concentrations for respirators are calculated using their assigned protection factors; and the fit test protocol is followed correctly.

We have a number of qualified individuals who use portable condensate nuclei counting devices to perform quantitative fit tests (QNFT). They report that fit factors measured with these devices typically exceed the required values by a factor of ten or greater. To repeat such a test would be excessive and statistically insignificant.

Repetitive testing is significant only when the measured fit factor approaches the minimum required value. The proposed revisions should reflect this. All QNFT protocols should be permitted to specify a fit factor above which repetitive testing is not required. Based on our experience a single test would ensure a good fit for most workers. Workers who cannot achieve the higher fit factors would be assured adequate protection by repetitive testing. This approach would avoid wasteful burdensome testing requirements that do not provide additional protection.

Preamble, p. 58895 — Respirators Worn for Comfort.

OSHA's proposal that compliance with the standard not be mandatory in "voluntary respirator use situations" would undermine the purpose and intent of employee respiratory protection. The goal of OSHA, industrial hygienists and safety professionals is to eliminate work place health hazards. When engineering and administrative controls are ineffective or infeasible, respirators

are to be worn. If there is no respiratory hazard, then no respirator should be worn. Issuance of respirators without them being required results in an unnecessary physiological burden to the worker and unnecessary cost to the employer.

Should OSHA pursue the course of broadening the scope of the standard to include "voluntary respirator use situations," then it would be difficult to lessen the program requirements. Respirator selection would still require workplace evaluation, employees would still need training, and employee medical evaluation may still be necessary.

Preamble p. 58906; proposed rule, (e) — Medical Evaluations.

We strongly support Alternative #2 (medical history and examination) for respirator users. This alternative offers the best protection for employees and employers regarding any medical problems and potential liabilities related to respirator use. It also provides employers with significant latitude in the development of medically appropriate respirator evaluations. Employers would be positioned appropriately to develop and implement respiratory protection programs that limit cost while protecting the health and safety of employees. We also support the proposed wording in nonmandatory Appendix C. Alternative 2 is the most comprehensive of the three and still allows latitude in the structure of a respiratory protection program.

We do not support alternatives 1 and 3. Neither of those alternatives require actual medical examination of respirator users.

Preamble, p. 58896; proposed rule, (e) Medical Evaluations -(1) — Medical Evaluation Threshold.

OSHA proposes that a threshold of five work hours of respirator use in any work week be required before a medical evaluation must be obtained. If such a proposal is included in the final standard, evaluation of the task and the type of respirator worn must also be considered.

A situation in which a worker is using a disposable dust/mist/fume respirator an hour a day, five days per week, while sweeping is quite different from a worker performing heavy labor for five consecutive hours while wearing a supplied air respirator.

Preamble, p. 58899; proposed rule, (c)Respiratory protection program —
Program Supervisor Requirements.

The proposed rule would require that a qualified supervisor is responsible for management and administration of the respiratory protection program. This responsibility will include annual program evaluations and frequent compliance inspections. To ensure program effectiveness, the supervisor should be given a degree of authority to take corrective measures as is the competent person referred to in other OSHA standards.

Preamble, page 58913; proposed rule, (f)Fit testing, (2) — Fit Test Frequency.

OSHA's proposes) that employees required to wear respirators for general use, be initially fit tested for each respirator to be worn and annually thereafter. Substance specific standards, which require semiannual fit testing will not be changed.

Experience in some of our facilities has shown that fit testing on 3-year intervals is sufficient to ensure a proper fit. Repeated fit testing rarely results in the selection of a different model or size of respirator unless there is a change in the wearers condition. Maintenance of fit factors between required fit tests is better achieved through proper training of respirator wearers. The importance of being refitted whenever physiological changes warrant it should be stressed to respirator wearers, their co-workers, and medical authorities. The respiratory protection program must include procedures for for-cause refitting as well as scheduled refitting.

Proposed Rule, Appendix A, II. 14. — Test Exercises.

The current standard requires that seven exercises be performed during the course of the test. It is requested that OSHA specifically state that the evaluation of the facepiece seal be conducted while the exercises are being performed. This will best approximate real world situations where the seal may be broken during physical activity.

There is a quantitative fit test device on the market which measures pressure differential to evaluate facepiece seal. Although this technique provides rapid results it is limited by the restriction that the wearer cannot breathe during the test. The result is a fit factor which is not related to typical conditions of use.

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Preamble, p. 58922; proposed rule (g)Use of respirators, (11) — Field Fit Checks.

The requirement that employees perform a facepiece seal check upon donning the respirator) remains in the proposed rule. Disposable, single-use, filtering-facepiece respirators are difficult – if not impossible to effectively check in the prescribed manner.

OSHA should specifically address the effectiveness of seal checking disposable, single use/filtering facepiece respirators.

Preamble, p. 58930 — Disposable Respirator Use for Asbestos Work

OSHA's intent to permit the use of disposable respirators for asbestos work requires clarification. If by disposable, OSHA means low maintenance respirators with elastomeric face pieces, then we agree. However, disposable respirators also include single- use, filtering-facepiece devices. We do not support the use of this type of respirator to prevent exposure to asbestos. These devices cannot be effectively field checked for a face-to-facepiece seal and therefore are not suitable for asbestos work.

Preamble, p. 58922; proposed rule, (k)Training, (2) — Frequency.

We concur with OSHA that annual training is the most effective means to ensure program effectiveness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Will A. Mathews".

WAM/ddf