

Respiratory Protection

Improper use of respirators can result in worker injury and illness and can also result in a Cal/OSHA enforcement visit. Cal/OSHA's regulation for worker use of respirators is in title 8 of the California Code of Regulations (T8CCR), [section 5144](#) and its appendices. The standard details minimum steps employers must take to ensure safe and effective use of respirators in the workplace. Section 5144 applies to all workplace respirator use. Many substance-specific standards, such as lead, asbestos, and carcinogens, also have additional respiratory protection requirements (Firefighters: also see [section 3409](#)).



When should respirators be used?

Before resorting to respirator use and whenever feasible, engineering controls (such as enclosure of the operation, mechanical ventilation, or substitution with less toxic material) must be used to reduce excessive airborne contaminant exposures (also see [section 5141](#)). Respirators should be used in the following circumstances:

- when necessary to protect the health of employees;
- during the time period necessary to install or implement feasible controls;
- where feasible controls fail to achieve full compliance; and
- in reasonably foreseeable emergencies.

What do the mandatory elements of a comprehensive respirator program include?

- **Written worksite-specific procedures** that address the following topics. See section 5144(c):
 - selection of appropriate respirators;
 - medical evaluation of respirator users;
 - annual fit testing of tight-fitting respirators;
 - routine and emergency use;
 - schedules to clean, disinfect, store, inspect, maintain, and repair respirators;
 - assurance of air quality, pressure, and volume requirements for supplied air devices;
 - initial and annual employee training; and
 - regular program effectiveness review and evaluation that includes changes in workplace conditions that affect respirator use.

- **Selected requirements** in section 5144:

- **Qualified program administrator:** required to administer/oversee and evaluate the respiratory protection program. See subsection (c)(3).
- **Atmospheres immediately dangerous to life or health:** specification of acceptable respirators and precautions to be taken. See subsections (d)(2) and (g)(3).
- **Filter end-of-service-life indicators:** required for gas/vapor air-purifying respirators, or the employer must have data showing acceptable change-out times. See subsection (d)(3)(C)2.
- **Employee medical evaluations:** required prior to first use of a respirator, as well as follow-up medical examinations and opportunities for employees to discuss their medical questionnaire results with the administering health care provider. See subsection (e).
- **Powered air-purifying respirators:** required to be provided to employees unable to wear a negative pressure respirator for medical reasons. See subsection (e)(6)(B).
- **Annual fit testing** of tight-fitting air-purifying and supplied-air respirators: acceptable methods of fit testing are detailed in Appendix A. See subsection (f).
- **Face piece-face seal checks:** must be performed by the user each time tight-fitting respirators are put on, as specified in Appendix B1. See subsection (g)(1)(C).
- **Annual employee training:** employees must be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills specific to the hazards in their particular workplace, including emergency use of respirators, their respirator limitations, and how to properly wear, store, and maintain their respirators. See subsection (k).
- **Ongoing respirator program evaluation:** including periodic consultation with employees. See subsection (l).



A powered air-purifying respirator

- **Voluntary use of respirators:** provisions where employees are not required to use respirators but choose to do so, and doing so does not in itself create a hazard. See subsection (c)(2) and Appendix D.
- **Breathing air quality:** provisions for ensuring air source quality for supplied-air respirators. See subsection (i).
- **Maintenance and care of respirators:** provisions made to clean, disinfect, store, inspect and repair respirators used by employees. See subsection (h).
- **Filters, cartridges, and canisters:** provisions for ensuring they are labeled and color-coded with the NIOSH-approved labels and the labels remain legible and are not removed. See subsection (j).



A supplied-air respirator

Further assistance on general respiratory protection in the workplace and respiratory protection resources specifically for health care providers, emergency responders, construction workers, firefighters, etc., may be obtained from the organizations listed below.

California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Occupational Health Branch:

- General Resources: www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPPP/DEODC/OHB/Pages/RespLinks.aspx
- Resources for Health Care: www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPPP/DEODC/OHB/Pages/HCResp.aspx

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), a unit of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that provides extensive information on all occupational safety and health hazards:

- For Respirator Users: www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/respusers.html
- Workplace Safety & Health Topics – Respirators: www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/respirators/

How can employers access the standards and obtain additional information?

This fact sheet only provides an overview, so you need to refer to section 5144 for the details:

www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5144.html

- Appendix A: www.dir.ca.gov/Title8/5144a.html
- Appendix B1: www.dir.ca.gov/Title8/5144b_1.html
- Appendix D: www.dir.ca.gov/Title8/5144d.html

All Cal/OSHA Regulations:

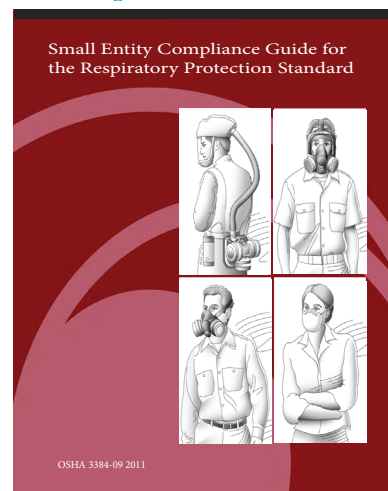
www.dir.ca.gov/samples/search/query.htm

Cal/OSHA Publications: www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/PubOrder.asp

- Respiratory Protection in the Workplace: www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/respiratory.pdf.
- Model Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP) for High Hazard Employers: www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/IIPP-Model-high-hazard.pdf.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA):

- Safety & Health Topics - Respiratory Protection: www.osha.gov/SLTC/respiratoryprotection/index.html
- Respiratory Protection eTool: www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/respiratory/
- FAQ: www.osha.gov/qna.pdf
- Small Entity Compliance Guide: www.osha.gov/Publications/3384small-entity-for-respiratory-protection-standard-rev.pdf



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