

UMBC Respiratory Protection Program

APPENDIX A: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

1. *What is a respirator?*

- o A respirator is a device that is worn over the face and mouth to prevent the respiration or exposure to hazardous substances such as dusts, vapors, fumes, or gasses. A tight-fitting respirator achieves this protection by forming a seal over the mouth and nose of the user and filtering the air that is inhaled through the device.

2. *Does a standard face mask (such as a surgical mask/3-ply mask worn to protect against COVID-19) count as a respirator?*

- o No. A surgical mask or other loose-fitting mask that is worn over the nose and mouth to prevent contamination of illnesses such as COVID-19 or the flu do not provide the same type and levels of protection as a tight-fitting respirator.

3. *When would I be required to wear a respirator at work?*

- o Any time that your work exposes you, or could potentially expose you, to a substance in the environment that would cause harm if inhaled. Examples include handling or working around chemicals that produce harmful gasses or vapors, tasks that create hazardous dust, or working in an environment where there is a high likelihood of exposure to an infectious disease, such as in healthcare or laboratory settings.

4. *I think I may need to wear a respirator at work but am not sure where to start. Who should I talk to?*

- o Have your supervisor contact Environmental Safety and Health at x5-2918.

5. *I am a student employee – do the Respiratory Protection Program requirements apply to me?*

- o Yes.

6. *I just want to wear a respirator because it's dusty or dirty where I work. Can I just buy my own respirator and start wearing it?*

- o No. Environmental Safety and Health must first be notified of any requests to wear a respirator prior to employee use due to the training and medical requirements that must be met, regardless of the reason for wearing one.

7. *Are there steps I need to take before I start wearing a respirator at work?*

- o Any employee who intends to use a respirator must be medically cleared by a physician, be fit-tested, and receive training. To begin this process, have your supervisor notify Environmental Safety and Health at x5-2918.

8. *Can I wear any type of respirator?*

- o No. There are many different types and levels of respirators that are geared toward specific hazards or environments, so one type of respirator would not provide unilateral protection for all hazards. Respiratory protection requirements vary, depending on the work being performed, and the hazard that the respirator will be protecting from. Environmental Safety and Health will assist you with choosing the respirator that will provide the best level of protection for the task or environment.

9. *My respirator no longer seems to be functioning or fitting properly. What should I do?*

- o Notify your supervisor and Environmental Safety and Health as soon as you feel that the respirator's ability to function appropriately is compromised.

10. *Where should I store my respirator when not in use?*

- o Your department should have an appropriate area to store your respirator safely. Ask your supervisor or notify Environmental Safety and Health x5-2918 if you are unsure.

11. *How often should I inspect my respirator?*

- o Respirators should always be inspected before each use.

12. *How often should respirators be cleaned?*

- o Respirators should be cleaned as often as needed to keep them in a sanitary and properly functioning condition. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions for more guidance on proper care of your respirator.

13. *What do I do if my respirator stops working properly or leaks while in use?*

- o If an employee, while wearing a respirator, detects a compromise or degradation in the satisfactory function of their respirator, they are to immediately leave the work area and perform personal decontamination procedures as necessary and notify supervision once able to do so.

14. *What happens if I can't pass the fit test?*

- o Environmental Safety and Health will assist with selecting a different respirator if unable to successfully complete a fit test with the selected respirator. If the employee is still unable to pass a fit test, then the employee will be issued a PAPR (Powered Air-Purifying Respirator).

15. *What happens if I am not medically cleared to wear a respirator, but am still required to wear respiratory protection?*

- o If you are not able to be medically cleared to wear a tight-fitting respirator, a PAPR will be issued.

16. *Where do I go for medical evaluation, fit testing and training?*

- o Environmental Safety and Health will work with the employee to arrange the date, time and location of evaluation and fit testing. Training is administered through Web Net.

17. Who pays for the medical evaluation, fit testing and training?

- o Training, fit testing, and medical evaluation will be provided at no cost to the employee.

18. Do I have to pay for my own respirator?

- o Respirators will be provided to the employee by their department.

19. The respirator I use is disposable. How do I get more if I run low?

- o Notify your supervisor so more can be ordered.

20. Can I reuse disposable respirators?

- o No, disposable respirators should be discarded after each use.

21. My respirator has external filters, canisters, or cartridges. When do they need to be replaced?

- o Whenever they become damaged, soiled, or when the user detects a noticeable decrease in protection, such as increased breathing resistance. Additionally, external filters, canisters and cartridges have a shelf life, and should be replaced when their expiration date is approaching. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions for guidance.

22. Can re-usable respirators be shared with co-workers?

- o Employees should refrain from sharing reusable respirators with coworkers unless they are fit tested and cleared to wear the exact same type and size of respirator and have been appropriately cleaned and sanitized. Emergency use respirators must be cleaned and disinfected after each use.

23. Do I need to take refresher training after my initial training?

- o Annual training is required for all employees who wear a respirator, within 365 calendar days of the last training completion. ESH will re-assign, and notify the employee when the training renewal date is approaching, but the employee should also make note of their training completion date.

24. Will I need to get fit tested again after my initial fit test?

- o Fit testing is required annually, within 365 calendar days of your last fit test. ESH will notify the employee when the fit testing renewal date is approaching, but the employee should also make note of the date of their last fit test.
- o Additionally, Environmental Safety and Health must be notified for follow up fit-testing when there are observed or reported changes in an employee's physical condition could affect the acceptable performance of the assigned respirator. Such conditions include, but are not limited to, facial scarring, dental changes, cosmetic surgery, or an obvious

change in body weight. Employees must notify their supervisor if the fit of the respirator is no longer acceptable.

25. What's the difference between qualitative and quantitative fit testing?

- o Qualitative fit testing relies on the senses of the user being fit tested to determine if there is a leakage in the seal of the face piece. Typically this is achieved through smell or taste, such as a bitter spray sprayed into a hood while wearing a respirator.
- o Quantitative fit testing uses a machine to objectively measure how well the respirator fits the user, such as a PortaCount machine, and provide a calculated score to indicate how tightly the respirator is sealed to the user's face.

26. Can I wear a respirator with facial hair?

- o Respirator users who wear a tight-fitting respirator must be clean shaven. Employees with facial hair are not permitted to use a tight-fitting respirator, as it prevents the respirator from forming an adequate seal on the user's face and reduces protection. Research has shown that even 24 hours of stubble growth can affect seal quality and compromise protection.
- o If you have facial hair and will need to wear a respirator, Environmental Safety and Health will assist with finding an appropriate respirator.

27. I wear corrective lenses that may interfere with wearing the respirator. What should I do?

- o With certain respirators, things such as corrective eyewear or safety glasses can affect the ability of the respirator to form an adequate seal on the user's face.
- o If you wear corrective lenses or other items that you feel may interfere with your ability to effectively wear a respirator, notify Environmental Safety and Health at x-5-2918 to explore other respiratory protection solutions.

28. Who should I contact if I have additional questions about respirators or the UMBC Respiratory Protection Program?

- o Environmental Safety and Health at x5-2918.

29. Are there reliable resources online that I can refer to for more information?

- o OSHA's website has many additional resources for more information on respiratory protection.
 - <https://www.osha.gov/respiratory-protection/general>