

TOOLBOX TALK #8

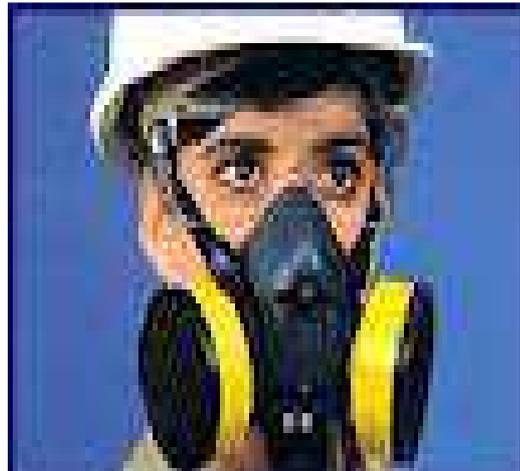
COMPLYING WITH RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

Respiratory protection is necessary when toxic contaminants are in the air. These contaminants are found in many work environments including construction. The problem is that some of these toxic contaminants are visible and some are not. Employers must always be aware of the existing and potential hazards to which their employees may be exposed. It is necessary for the employer to perform a proper evaluation of the working environment to ascertain what contaminants exist and how to best protect employees.

To properly perform the evaluation, the employer may require the services of an industrial hygienist or other health and safety professional. Although respiratory protection should not be the first remedy of choice, it often is the only way to protect employees from airborne contaminants. OSHA favors using the hierarchy of controls with a preference for engineering and administrative controls.

When respirators must be used, they will only provide protection if the employees wear them at all times in which they are exposed to contaminants at levels above the permitted unprotected level. The best way to ensure that the employees are complying with the use of respirators is to have them “buy into the program” and take ownership.

The first and most important step, once the hazard has been characterized by the employer, is training. Training is best accomplished with small groups of employees. It is important to explain to the employees what the hazard is, what the associated health effects are and why NIOSH-approved respirators should be used. A dialog of questions and answers also should be encouraged.



Where possible, try to have the training and discussion in the employees' primary language. Rather than threaten employees with disciplinary action if they do not comply with the requirements, make them understand why it is so important to protect their health ... for the well-being of both themselves and their families.