

Note: Information contained within this document contain excerpts from the current CSA Standard: CAN CSA Z94.4 Selection Use and care of Respirators and from the 3M Fit Testing Procedural Guidelines

Respirators play a critical role in protecting workers from airborne particulates, dusts, fumes, vapours, gases, mists, smoke, etc. It is vital that workers, supervisors and employers understand how to select, care for and use them and are properly fit tested to ensure protection from harm.

All individuals who are, or may be required to wear respirators of any kind, must have the proper training and fit testing. This includes air-purifying and air-supplied respirators, such as;

- ✓ **Dust Masks**
- ✓ **Half-Face Masks**
- ✓ **Full-Face Masks**
- ✓ **Respirator Hoods with Seals**
- ✓ **SCBAs (self-contained breathing apparatus)**

By law, fit testing must be conducted at least every two years and no person shall use or be assigned to use a respirator unless they have received training and fit testing by a competent person. To increase safety, we strongly recommend annual fit testing.

Purpose of Fit Testing

Fit testing verifies a user's ability to obtain an effective seal and an acceptably comfortable fit when wearing the type of respirator required for the specific environment. This process also verifies the user is competent in donning and doffing the respirator, as well as inspecting it and performing a seal check.

When is Fit Testing required?

A fit test must be carried out;

- a) after completion of user screening
- b) after or during training
- c) prior to initial use of a respirator
- d) when changes to a user's physical condition (e.g., significant weight change or changes to facial or dental features) could affect the respirator fit
- e) when there is a change in use of respirators (e.g., make, model, size)
- f) when a user experiences significant discomfort during use or has difficulty completing a seal check
- g) when there is a change in other Personal Protective Equipment that could affect respirator use
- h) at least every 2 years.

Delays, Failures, Re-testing, etc.

To ensure that the fit testing process goes seamlessly, please carefully follow the guidelines we have provided below.

Delays can be caused by a number of things; testing room not set up or properly equipped, insufficient equipment for testing, users not clean-shaven, users late for appointed times, re-testing, etc.

If delays, for whatever reason, extend the appointment beyond the scheduled finishing time, or require a return visit, extra charges will apply.

Scheduling of Fit Testing

- Fit testing may be performed on up to 3 people at one time. Please schedule in groups of 3
- Groups are expected to arrive 5 minutes prior to their scheduled time
- Each group takes 30 minutes to fit test
- Workers who are required to wear more than one type of respirator must be fitted for every different respiration device they will wear. These tests can occur back-to-back and would take approximately 15 extra minutes for each additional device, after the first fit test (30 minutes)
- In the event of a failed fit test, participants must wait a minimum of 15 minutes before re-testing can occur.

Priority of Fit Test Scheduling

To minimize delays, please schedule appointments in this manner:

1. Persons who require fit testing on more than one device
2. Persons who have experienced difficulties with fit testing in the past
3. Persons who use a single device and have experienced no previous difficulties in fit testing

In the Event of a Failed Fit Test

It is not unusual that some people have difficulty obtaining a proper fit with the selected respirator. It is impossible to design a respirator that fits everybody.

If a person fails a fit test, this is not a failure on their part. It is simply an indication that the respirator selected does not fit them well enough and that an alternate must be used. The alternative respirator must offer at least the same level of protection as the unit originally selected for the environment

The Employer Must Provide a Variety of Respirators for Fit Testing

The fit tester does NOT provide respirators. Providing the proper equipment, in sufficient numbers, styles and sizes, is the sole responsibility of the employer.

Since no single make, model or size can be expected to fit all persons, the employer must provide a sufficient variety of respirator types to ensure that each user can achieve a satisfactory fit.

The fit tester will not force-fit a respirator to a user.

Note: all respirators for use in Ontario workplaces must be NIOSH-approved. Failure to provide a sufficient number of acceptable respirators could lead to delays in fit testing and additional costs.

Sharing Respirators

When respirators used for fit testing are not individually assigned, cleaning and sanitizing must be performed between uses. Respirators that cannot be sanitized (e.g., filtering face pieces) must not be used by more than one person.

The "Fit Testing Room"

Please designate a room or secluded area solely dedicated to testing on the day of your appointment.

Ideally this room will have;

- Good ventilation
- Clean working surfaces
- An adjacent waiting area
- Close access to a bathroom for hand and face washing

This room should be equipped with:

- Table (large enough to lay out the entire Fit Test Kit – 8 to 10 feet in length)
- Jug of water
- Cups or glasses – preferably from a dispenser to avoid aerosol contamination from tests
- The entire variety of respirators to be tested
- Selection of alternative models in case of failures

Responsibilities of the Users

USERS MUST BE CLEAN SHAVEN. This applies not just to fit testing, but at ALL times when respirators are in use. Companies must develop a "*Clean Shaven Policy*" for respirator users that must be strictly adhered to at all times.

Fit testing requires skins surfaces that are free of interference from hair where the respirator seals to the skin. Any person who is not clean-shaven will not be fit tested or certified to wear a respiration device.

Individuals should shave as closely to their fit testing time as possible. Shaving within 12 hours of testing is recommended, although some persons with light hair growth may be fine within 24 hours.

Obstructions to a Respirator Fit

Fit testers will not perform a fit test if they observe that the user is not free from interference (from hair, head coverings, jewelry, clothing, etc.) at the point(s) where the respirator is designed to seal to the skin.

Individuals who are unwilling or unable to comply with this interference-free requirement, or who cannot achieve an acceptable fit, must be prohibited from using respirator devices.

There are NO exceptions.

Integration of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

When PPE such as eye, face, head, or hearing protectors or protective garments are required during respirator use, they must be worn during fit testing to ensure the respirator seal isn't compromised.

Eating & Drinking

Users should not eat or drink anything, other than water, within 30 minutes of their scheduled time slot. Food and/or drinks can leave a residual taste in the mouth that could cause a fit test failure

Smoking

Users should not smoke 30 minutes prior to the scheduled fit testing, as this can also cause a failed test.

Questions?

If you have any questions about your fit testing appointment, please contact us in advance of your appointment, as soon as possible.

Please review the following page, containing the responsibilities of the employer

Responsibilities of the Employer

Respiratory protection must be used to protect a user from inhaling a hazardous atmosphere when engineering or administrative control measures are not practicable or not adequate, while such controls are being instituted, or when they are shut down for maintenance, repair, or emergency.

The employer is responsible for preparing and implementing, in consultation with the users, a written respiratory protection program, including all of the elements below. Written procedures, as appropriate, must also be included.

The employer shall ensure that;

- a) its respiratory protection program is effective (as per the CSA Standard, etc.);
- b) all program roles are assigned to qualified persons; and
- c) each individual assigned to one or more program roles shall be able to demonstrate and maintain competence in the roles for which they are responsible.

A respiratory protection program shall include the following roles:

- a) program administrator;
- b) respirator user;
- c) supervisor;
- d) person selecting respirators;
- e) fit tester;
- f) issuer of respirators;
- g) maintenance personnel; and

A respiratory protection program shall consist of the following components:

- a) roles and responsibilities
- b) hazard assessment
- c) respirator selection
- d) training
- e) respirator fit testing
- f) use of respirators
- g) cleaning, inspection, maintenance, and storage of respirators
- h) health surveillance
- i) program evaluation; and
- j) recordkeeping

Note: For additional responsibilities please review the CSA Standard Z94.4 and applicable occupational health and safety legislation.