

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

If an entity has employees who are exposed to breathing hazards like fumes, gases vapors, harmful dusts and molds, or oxygen deficient atmospheres, Cal/OSHA requires that the employer have a written respiratory protection program. This program would, by necessity, be tailored to the entity's individual exposures. Like other state mandated programs, if your operations trigger this requirement, the program should be a supplement to the entity's IIPP.

The obvious first step is to conduct an assessment to determine if any of the employer's workers are exposed to respiratory hazards. This is normally determined by an expert specializing in evaluating these types of exposures. Their assessment may include an evaluation of the work areas, an analysis of chemical exposures, and air monitoring, if exposures are identified that cannot be engineered away, the employer needs to establish and implement a respiratory protection program.

The elements of the program required by the State include:

- The employer determining which respirators will be provided;
- Medical evaluation of employees that will use the respirators;
- Fit testing to ensure the proper match between the employees and the respirator;
- Monitoring of the use of the respirator in the workplace to ensure proper use;
- A maintenance program to guarantee proper storage, repairs, cleaning, and disinfecting;
- Procedures to ensure, if air tanks are used, adequate air quality from those air tanks;
- A training program for the proper use, maintenance, and medical problem recognition; and
- Ongoing program evaluation looking at compliance and alternatives.

We are basically talking about two situations: the lack of adequate oxygen (requiring atmosphere-supplying respirators), or air that needs to have hazards filtered out of it (requiring air-purifying respirators). These respirators can be negative pressure respirators (where the employee's breathing pulls the air), or positive-pressure respirators where air under pressure is forced into the respirator). When the hazards cannot be eliminated or controlled, including during emergencies, appropriate respirators must be used.

Note: Upon request YCPARMIA provides fit-testing services to its member at no cost.

Next Topic: Safety – Aerosol Transmissible Diseases