**RESPIRATORY PROTECTION PROGRAM**

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

This respiratory protection model program is intended to help public employers and employees comply with the Respiratory Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.134).

The Respiratory Protection Standard specifies only the minimum requirements for an effective respiratory protection program. Employers are encouraged to exceed these minimum criteria if doing so enhances the safety and health of their employees.

***Who should read this respiratory protection model program?***

Employers and employees should read this model program if it is likely that a respiratory protection program will need to be established and implemented. Under the Respiratory Protection standard, the PEOSH Program may require the employer to establish a respiratory protection program when exposure to an airborne containment or low oxygen levels can cause illness or injury to a worker's health, and when these health effects can be prevented by the appropriate selection and use of a respirator.

***What is a respirator?***

Respirators are devices that protect workers from inhaling harmful substances. These substances can be in the form of airborne vapors, gases, dust, fogs, fumes, mists, smokes, or sprays. Some respirators also ensure that workers do not breathe air that contains dangerously low levels of oxygen.

There are two major types of respirators:

1. Air-purifying respirators, which remove contaminants from the air.
2. Atmosphere-supplying respirators, which provide clean air from an uncontaminated source

Respirators provide protection from respiratory hazards only when they are used properly.

***What is a respiratory protection program?***

A respiratory protection program is a cohesive collection of worksite-specific procedures and policies that addresses all respiratory protection elements required by the standard. For example, a respiratory protection program must contain specific procedures describing how respirators will be selected, fitted, used, maintained and inspected in a particular workplace.

***When am I required to establish a respiratory protection program?***

Generally, whenever the employer or the PEOSH Program requires employees to wear respirators. For example, the establishment of a respiratory protection program may be needed:

* If employees work in situations where the level of oxygen is insufficient, or potentially insufficient.
* If employees are potentially exposed to harmful levels of hazardous gases or vapors.
* If employees are exposed to other potential respiratory hazards, such as dust, mists, fumes, sprays, and other airborne particulates.

Employers need to supply workers with respirators when the preferred methods of protecting them from breathing contaminated air are insufficient to reduce the contamination to nonhazardous levels. These preferred methods include:

* Engineering controls, such as ventilation.
* Substituting non-hazardous materials for the materials that pose respiratory hazards
* Administrative controls such as scheduling major maintenance for weekends or times when few workers are present.

Refer to the standard in Appendix 1 if there are questions about when to supply employees with respirators.

***What is the Respiratory Protection Standard?***

The *Respiratory Protection Standard* requires employers to establish and maintain a respiratory protection program to protect their respirator-wearing workers. The PEOSH Program has adopted a revised standard, which became effective on October 5, 1998. (The complete text of the revised standard is included in Appendix 1.)

The revised standard incorporates new scientific principles and technologies that have emerged since 1971. Because of advances in technology, many areas in the previous standard had become outdated.

The new standard is intended to:

* Enhance the protection of worker health.
* Promote more effective use of respirators.
* Make it easier to complay with its provisions.
* Make it easier to understand the policy and procedures to follow when implementing a respiratory protection program.

***How does the new standard differ from the old standard that it replaces?***

The new standard:

* Contains new provisions that recognize the needs of small workplaces.
* Requires written respiratory protection programs to include work-site specific procedures.
* Requires that a qualified “program administrator” oversees the respiratory protection program.
* Provides:
	+ Definitions that will eliminate confusion about terminology and how these terms apply to respirators and their use.
	+ Criteria for selecting respirators.
	+ Clear language on the requirement for medical examinations of workers and the use of medical questionnaires.
* Requires employers to perform a hazard determination to identify respiratory hazards and work conditions.
* Requires annual fit testing for all tight-fitting respirators, and includes protocols for fit testing.
* Addresses the use of respirators in situations that the PEOSH Program characterizes as Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH).

***How does the new Respiratory Protection Standard recognize the needs of small workplaces?***

Among other things, the revised Respiratory Protection standard:

* Allows the use of a medical questionnaire to screen for employee health conditions which could affect the ability to use a respirator. The questionnaire must be administered by a physician or other licensed health care professional.
* Allows medical evaluations to be conducted either by a physician or by another licensed health care professional.
* Requires medical evaluations to be conducted after the initial evaluation only when specific conditions indicate a need for a re-evaluation.
* Minimizes the amount of paperwork required in connection with medical evaluations.
* Establishes flexible requirements for cleaning and disinfecting respirators issued to individual employees.
* Allows tags to be used to document respirator inspections rather than written records.
* Allows the employer to obtain a certificate of breathing gas analysis from the supplier instead of the requirement to conduct their own gas analysis.