



## 3.25 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

### Breathing Protection Information Sheet

#### Purpose

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide information on personal protective equipment (PPE) which may be required to minimise a breathing risk at work.

Specific requirements may be outlined in the [Work Health and Safety \(WHS\) Regulations 2012 \(SA\)](#) and [Approved Codes of Practice](#). The references to the standards and resources have been included in this information sheet.

**This Information Sheet should be read in conjunction with the [HSW Handbook Chapter Hazard Management](#).**

Personal Protective Equipment is the **least effective** control measure. This is because users have to remember to wear it, and it does nothing to minimise the underlying hazard. For these reasons, higher level controls must first be considered.

#### Q1 When should breathing protection be considered as a control measure?

Where a risk of injury or illness still remains after all other control measures have been applied, a School/Branch may be able to further minimise the remaining risk, by the provision and use of suitable PPE to prevent damage to the respiratory tract and system. Refer [WHS Regulations 2012 \(SA\) \[36\]](#).

Breathing protection is required where it is reasonably foreseeable that the operator could be exposed to a substance, agent or contaminant after all other practicable controls have been implemented. Breathing protection (or Respiratory Protection Equipment, RPE) should only be used as a short-term control measure. Where possible a fume cupboard or other extraction device should be used to minimise the need for RPE

In special situations:

- the School/Branch may mandate the use of breathing protection upon entry to the area as a general precaution such as in a workshop or laboratory, based on a reasonable assessment of the hazards in the area.
- a risk assessment for a task or process, e.g. the use of hazardous chemicals or extremely dusty environment where specific controls would be prescribed to manage the hazard, however normally this control measure would be a fume cupboard or other extraction device which negates the need for RPE for example when the area is using a particularly hazardous chemical. As a part of the emergency contingency measures RPE may be required if the substance is spilt outside of a containment area (e.g. fume cupboard, glove box etc). This would allow clean up with exposure to the individual.

Where breathing protection is mandatory in an area, appropriate signage complying with [AS 1319 \(1994\) "Safety signs for the occupational environment"](#) must be displayed. Examples of approved signage appear in [Appendix A](#).

#### Q2 What types of Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE) are available?

Breathing protection can be categorised into two types:

- **Air-purifying devices:** These are designed to filter contaminated air before it is inhaled by personnel. They exist as either disposable respirators or non-disposable respirators with disposable filters.
- **Air-supplied devices:** These deliver clean air from an independent supply to the wearer. Air-supplied respirators are often used for toxic or oxygen-deficient atmospheres and confined spaces.

HSW Handbook	3.25 Personal Protective Equipment Information Sheet	Effective Date:	1 March 2016	V1.0
Authorised by	Associate Director, HR Compliance and Improvement Services	Review Date:	1 March 2019	Page 1 of 3
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- Q3 What are the selection, use and maintenance requirements of RPE?**  
Where RPE is required to be worn, a respiratory protection program must be established by the School/Branch as per [AS/NZS 1715:2009 Selection, Use and Maintenance of Respiratory Protective Equipment](#). The program includes procedures specific to your worksite intended to prevent you from inhaling harmful contaminants in your workplace. For more details please refer to the standard.
- Q4 What should I do if RPE affects communication?**  
If the use or wearing of equipment affects communication, it is important that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that the situation does not create additional risk to the operator. This should be considered in the risk assessment of the activity. (Refer to the [HSW Handbook Chapter Hazard Management](#) for further information on this process.)
- Q5 Can RPE be shared by workers?**  
The sharing of equipment presents a hygiene risk and therefore RPE should be provided for exclusive use or sterilised after each use.
- Q6 What instruction may be needed for RPE?**  
Where a risk assessment control measure includes the requirement to wear or use RPE, it is important that workers are instructed by their Manager/Supervisor or the person who is directing the work, on the nature of the work and how to correctly fit the RPE. This will also include suitable selection, fit and comfort for the individual, prior to commencing the activity. This instruction could be provided during the local induction if the task/activity is conducted on a regular basis or prior to conducting the activity if it is a new task/activity.
- Q7 What are the storage requirements for Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE)?**  
Users should consult manufacturers' instructions, particularly with regard to storage recommendations. Considerations should be made for prevention of
- Damage & distortion to face pieces
  - Contact with foreign particles, atmospheres and substances which could cause deterioration
  - Contamination, particularly for breathing equipment used to supply air to a person.
- Q8 Where can I obtain further information about breathing protection?**
- The University's [HSW Handbook Chapter Hazard Management](#) (Hierarchy of control measures);
  - [AS/NZS 1715 "Selection, use and maintenance of respiratory protective devices"](#);
  - [AS/NZS 1716 "Respiratory protective devices"](#);
  - [WHS Regulations 2012 \(SA\)](#).

Please contact [Human Resources](#) for further assistance.

HSW Handbook	3.25 Personal Protective Equipment Information Sheet	Effective Date:	1 March 2016	V1.0
Authorised by	Associate Director HR Compliance and Improvement Services	Review Date:	1 March 2019	Page 2 of 3
Warning	This process is uncontrolled when printed. The current version of this document is available on the HSW Website			

Appendix A – Examples of approved safety signs

This is a sample of some approved safety signs under [AS 1319 \(1994\) "Safety signs for the occupational environment"](#).

You must ensure any signage you purchase or install meet this standard.

Please consult AS1319 or [Human Resources](#) if you require any advice on selecting approved signage.



Gloves Required



Safety Goggles Required



Half-face Respirator Required



HSW Handbook	3.25 Personal Protective Equipment Information Sheet	Effective Date:	1 March 2016	V1.0
Authorised by	Associate Director HR Compliance and Improvement Services	Review Date:	1 March 2019	Page 3 of 3
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