

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Information Sheet: Respiratory Protection Equipment

Purpose

The purpose of this information sheet is to assist users with the selection use and maintenance of suitable respiratory protection equipment and to protect against substances which could enter the body through the respiratory system.

Application

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.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is the **least effective** control measure as it does nothing to minimise the underlying hazard. PPE relies on human behaviour and supervision. For these reasons, you need to do a risk assessment to identify higher level control measures before relying on PPE.

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

Q1 When should Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE) be considered as a control measure?

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

Respiratory 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. 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 Faculty/Division/Area 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.
- 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 no exposure to the individual. Note: Where there is a life-threatening risk to any workers or others in the area (i.e. immediate health effects) in the event of a spill, the Emergency Services (MFS) should be contacted in lieu of using RPE, by dialling (0) 000. This should be determined, recorded and communicated to workers when completing the risk assessment for the activity or when they are provided information/instruction by the Supervisor during their induction.

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.

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Q3 What are the selection, use and maintenance requirements of Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE)?

Where RPE is required to be worn, a respiratory protection program must be established by the Faculty/Division/Area as per [AS/NZS 1715: 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. The program requires the development of procedures for the following:

- Appointment of a program administrator;
- Selection of RPE;
- Medical screening of users of RPE;
- Information, instruction and training;
- The issue of RPE;
- The fitting of equipment;
- Wearing of RPE;
- Disposal of equipment;
- Record keeping;
- Program evaluation.

For specific requirements please refer to Standard AS/NZS 1715.

Q4 What is the role of the Supervisor/Person in control of the area/activity when Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) is a control measure?

The Supervisor/Personal in control is to ensure:

- that the appropriate RPE is used and worn by the worker;
- that the workers are provided with the appropriate level of information, instruction and training (as applicable) in the use, maintenance and storage of the RPE;
- that the RPE is used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions;
- that the RPE does not interfere with any medical conditions of the worker using it and is a suitable size and fit;
- that appropriate signs are used to remind workers where it must be worn;
- that the RPE is periodically assessed to ensure it is and continues to be effective;
- that the RPE is maintained, repaired or replaced and stored correctly (It is clean, hygienic and in good working order) so that it continues to minimise risk to the worker.

Q5 What is the role of the worker when Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE) is required to be worn?

Workers are required to:

- use or wear the equipment in accordance with any information/instruction provided by their Supervisor/Person in control of the area/activity or by a registered training organisation where a competency is required; and
- to report if there is any damage or defect relating to the equipment.

Q6 What should I do if Respiratory Protection Equipment (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.)

Q7 Can Respiratory Protection Equipment (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.

Q8 What information, instruction and training may be needed for Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE)?

Where a risk assessment control measure includes the requirement to wear or use RPE, it is important that workers are provided with the relevant level of information/instruction/training by their Supervisor or the person who is directing the work, on the nature of the work, how to correctly fit the RPE and the limitations of the RPE. This will also include suitable selection, fit and comfort for the individual, prior to commencing the activity. This information/instruction/training 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. The frequency will depend on the complexity of the activity and the level of risk. To determine the level of information/instruction/training and requirements for record keeping refer to the [HSW Handbook chapter HSW Training Plan](#).

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Q9 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.

Q10 Where can I obtain further information about Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE)?

- 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 \(SA\)](#).
- SafeWork Australia – Video <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/media-centre/personal-protective-equipment-airborne-contaminants>

Q11 Where can I find more information on Respiratory Protection

If you would like more information about the Personal Protective Equipment chapter of the HSW Handbook please contact your local [HSW contact](#)

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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 your [local HSW Team](#) if you require any advice on selecting approved signage.



Gloves Required



Safety Goggles Required



Half-face Respirator Required



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