

# Hazard Management Procedure

## 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.

Note that personal protective equipment (PPE) (which respiratory protection equipment is a part of) is the **least effective** control measure as it does not contribute to minimising 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 should be read in conjunction with the [Hazard Management Procedure](#).

### 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 risk further.

In special situations:

- the area may mandate the use of respiratory 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, emergency services, the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (SAMFS) should be contacted in lieu of using RPE, by dialling (0) 000.

These actions 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 respiratory protection is mandatory in an area, appropriate signage (complying with the relevant Australian Standard) should be displayed on all entry points. Examples of signage appear in [Appendix A](#).

### Q2 What types of respiratory protection equipment (RPE) are available?

Refer to the SafeWork SA [website](#) for information on the types of RPE available.

### Q3 When is health monitoring required due to the use of respiratory protection equipment (RPE) to prevent exposure to airborne contaminants?

Health monitoring must be provided if:

- workers are using, handling, generating or storing hazardous chemicals (in particular, a chemical listed in [schedules 10 and 14 of the Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012](#)), and
- the work is ongoing, and
- there is a significant risk to health because of exposure.

Refer to the [Air and Health Monitoring Information Sheet](#) for more information.

As the level of risk depends on the frequency, duration and level of exposure, carrying out a risk assessment is the best way to decide if there is significant risk or not. If risks are significant but not adequately controlled or there is uncertainty about the degree of risk, health monitoring is required.

Contact the [HSW Team](#) for assistance. Specialist advice may be required from an occupational hygienist or a medical practitioner with experience in health monitoring.

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**Q4 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 which should comply with [AS/NZS 1715: Selection, Use and Maintenance of Respiratory Protective Equipment](#).

A respiratory protection program includes procedures specific to your area intended to prevent inhalation of harmful contaminants. 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
- any identified issues of using RPE
- the correct way to fit the equipment
- when RPE is required to be worn
- storage and disposal of RPE
- record keeping
- program evaluation.

For specific requirements refer to [AS/NZS 1715: Selection, Use and Maintenance of Respiratory Protective Equipment](#).

**Q5 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/person in control is to ensure that the:

- stocks of RPE are adequate for the area
- appropriate RPE is used and worn by the worker
- workers are provided with the appropriate level of information, instruction, and training (as applicable) in the use, maintenance, and storage of the RPE
- RPE is used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
- RPE does not interfere with any medical conditions of the worker using it and is a suitable size and fit
- appropriate signs are used to remind workers where it must be worn
- The RPE is periodically assessed (e.g. fit tested) to ensure it is and continues to be effective
- RPE is maintained, repaired, replaced or disposed of and stored correctly, and that it is clean, hygienic and in good working order, so that it continues to minimise risk to the worker
- associated records are kept (e.g. information, instruction, and training, fit testing, air monitoring, risk assessments, etc.)

**Q6 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
- inspect the RPE prior to commencement of the task to ensure it is in good working condition
- to report if there is any damage or defect relating to the equipment and obtain a replacement before continuing the task.

**Q7 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 and implemented before the task is undertaken. (Refer to the [Hazard Management Procedure](#) for further information on this process.) If the issue occurs during the task, report it immediately to your supervisor.

**Q8 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 cleaned/sterilised after each use.

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**Q9 What information, instruction and training may be needed for respiratory protection equipment (RPE)?**

If a risk assessment control measure involves the use of respiratory protective equipment (RPE), it is crucial for the workers to receive appropriate information, instruction, and training from their supervisor or the person in charge of the work. This should cover the nature of the work, correct fitting of the RPE, and limitations of the RPE, as well as suitable selection, fit, and comfort for each individual before starting the task. If the activity is conducted regularly, this information can be provided during the local induction. For new tasks or activities, it should be provided before starting the work. The frequency of this training depends on the level of risk and the complexity of the activity.

To determine the necessary level of training and record-keeping requirements, refer to the [Information, Instruction, and Training Procedure](#).

**Q10 What are the storage requirements for respiratory protection equipment (RPE)?**

Users should consult the 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 respiratory equipment used to supply air to a person.

**Q11 Where can I find more information on respiratory protection?**

SafeWork SA [website](#)  
[AS/NZS 1715: Selection, Use and Maintenance of Respiratory Protective Equipment](#).

If you require further information, contact the [HSW Team](#).

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Appendix A – Examples of safety signs

This is a sample of commonly used safety signs meeting the [Australian Standard AS 1319 \(1994\) Safety Signs for the Occupational Environment](#).

Please consult [Australian Standard AS 1319 \(1994\) Safety Signs for the Occupational Environment](#) or contact [the HSW Team](#) if you require advice on selecting signage.



Gloves Required



Safety Goggles Required



Half-face Respirator Required



Hearing Protection Required



Safety Boots Required



Protective Clothing Required

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