

Respirator Fit-Testing and Staff with Facial Hair

Vanderbilt Environmental Health and Safety (VEHS) provides fit testing services for the Vanderbilt Medical Center Airborne Precautions Respiratory Protection Program.

Consistent with OSHA requirements, persons with beards or long sideburns cannot be fit tested due to the inability to get a good facial seal. **OSHA law prohibits those individuals from wearing a tight fitting respirator until the person is clean-shaven and fit-tested.**

Options for staff with facial hair:

- Shave facial hair to be compliant for fit testing and when providing care to Airborne Precautions patients.
- Request that your department/unit management purchase a powered air purifying respirator that you can use when you are required to provide care for patients on Airborne Precautions. (Information regarding purchase and use is available through VEHS.)
- Work with your department/unit management to ensure that you are never scheduled to provide care to patients on Airborne Precautions.
- Transfer to another unit/department where use of the N95 respirator/fit testing is not required.

RESPIRATOR FIT TESTING FACIAL HAIR GUIDELINES



If there is facial hair anywhere along the red area, it will **prevent the respirator from sealing** against the skin, and will not provide protection against infectious agents.

Edges of respirator create seal against clean-shaven skin. This moustache **does not** interfere with the respirator seal.



INFORMATION FROM THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (OSHA)

OSHA Regulation:

http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=12716

1910.134(g)(1) Facepiece seal protection.

1910.134(g)(1)(i) *The employer shall not permit respirators with tight-fitting facepieces to be worn by employees who have:*

1910.134(g)(1)(i)(A) *Facial hair that comes between the sealing surface of the facepiece and the face or that interferes with valve function;*

OSHA Interpretation Letter:

http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=INTERPRETATIONS&p_id=19355

This is in response to your letter [...] regarding the use of respirators.

A copy of the pertinent section of the respirator standard that applies, [29 CFR 1910.134(g)(1)(i-iii)], is enclosed. It states that respirators shall not be worn when conditions prevent a good face seal. Such conditions may be a growth of beard, sideburns, a skull cap that projects under the facepiece, or temple pieces on glasses. This regulation does not ban facial hair on respirator users, per se, from the workplace. However, when a respirator must be worn to protect employees from airborne contaminants, it has to fit correctly, and this will require the wearer's face to be clean-shaven where the respirator seals against it.

It does not matter if hair is allowed to grow on other areas of the face, if it does not protrude under the respirator seal, or extend far enough to interfere with the device's function (such as the interference with valve function). Accordingly, short mustaches, sideburns and small goatees that are trimmed so that no hair underlies the seal of the respirator present no hazard and do not violate [29 CFR 1910.134(g)(1)(i)]. In general, however, beards present serious problems of acceptability because their texture and density vary daily, there is no consistency to respirator fit, and there is higher leakage.

OSHA Citation Guidelines

http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=DIRECTIVES&p_id=2275

1. Facepiece Seal Protection (g)(1):
 - a. Inspection Guidelines - The CSHO should be alert for the presence of facial hair (more than one day's growth) that comes between the sealing surface of the respirator and the face as well as other conditions that could result in facepiece seal leakage or interfere with valve function of tight-fitting respirators, such as the presence of facial scars, the wearing of jewelry, or the use of headgear that projects under the facepiece seal. ...
 - b. Citation Guidelines - CSHO should cite (g)(1)(i)(A) when employees' facial hair comes between the sealing surface of the facepiece and the face or interferes with valve function;...