

TOOLBOX TALK
NO.6
RESPIRATORY PROTECTIVE
EQUIPMENT



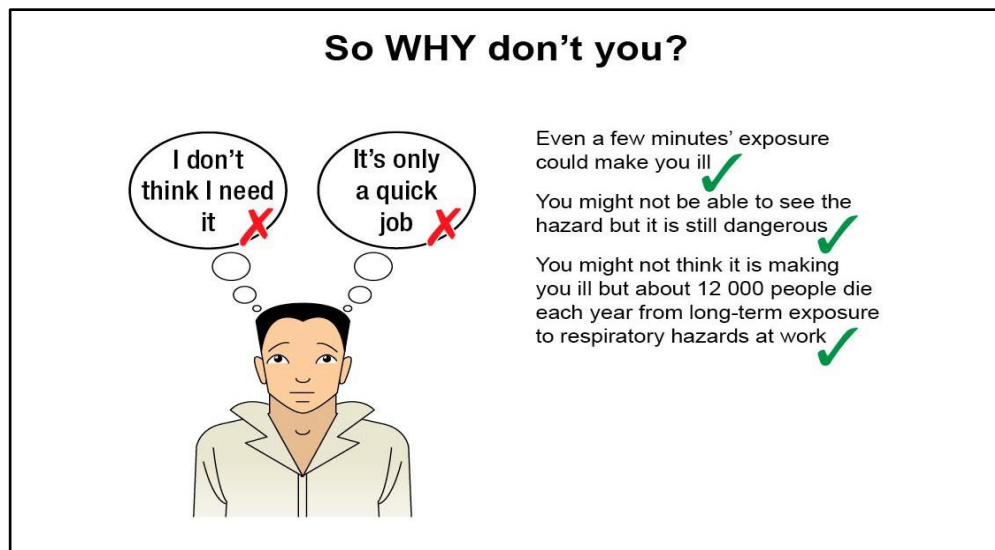
Your mask can protect you!

The aim of this talk is to raise your awareness about the benefits of wearing your respiratory protective equipment. This talk will provide guidance on the **importance of fit testing** for tight-fitting masks and practical tips on how to carry out a fit check.

The main benefit of wearing a mask is that it helps prevent you from getting ill and therefore helps keep you working. Specifically, it helps prevent the development of illnesses which could affect your airways – which could reduce the quality and length of your life.

Wearing a mask can stop you from developing the symptoms of respiratory illness caused by inhalation of hazardous substances at work (for example, coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness or difficulty in breathing).

There were an estimated 12,000 deaths in 2009/10 and another 12,000 deaths in 2010/11 from long-term exposure to respiratory hazards at work.



Many dangerous substances exist as a fine dust or fume, or as a gas or vapour which you can't see in the air. (Think about the oxygen we breathe – we can't see it.)

We need to work with you to reduce the risks to you from potential exposures to these dangerous substances.

Getting involved in choosing your mask will help you find a more comfortable mask which is suitable for you. Different masks are available, with different sizes and designs. Depending on the shape and size of your face, you may require a different mask. **ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL!**

Some masks require a tight fit to your face. With these types, it is essential that you are fit tested as part of the selection process to ensure that the mask forms a good seal to your face.

At first, the mask may feel uncomfortable (for example, you may experience some resistance or a slight increase in the effort required to breathe through your mask).



If this is something you can't tolerate, you need to talk to your manager or safety representative about the possibility of using a different type of mask which is more comfortable to wear and still provides the level of protection needed.

Some masks, such as disposable dust masks, should be replaced every day. Reusable masks will eventually become clogged and you may notice it becomes harder to breathe through – which means the filter needs changing.

To reduce the likelihood of this and other problems occurring with your mask, suitable training for you on how to check, put on, use, maintain and store your mask is important. This training should include how and when you should change your mask's filters (if applicable), or when to dispose of your mask.

Your mask should be chosen so you can wear it correctly when doing your job. If your mask interferes with other PPE – such as your safety spectacles/goggles and hard hat – it is important to sort this problem out. All your PPE needs to be compatible so that it all works effectively when worn together. It is important to remember that damage to health is not always immediately noticeable.

Also remember that people can be affected differently following exposure to hazardous substances – and, in the case of long-term ill-health – we don't know who is more likely to become ill (i.e. develop respiratory diseases). Why gamble with your health? An easy way to protect your long-term health is to wear your mask and wear it correctly.

Many masks rely on a good seal against the face so that, when you breathe air in, it is drawn into the filter material where the air is cleaned. If there are any gaps around the edges of the mask, 'dirty' air will pass through these gaps and into your lungs. It is therefore very important that you put your mask on correctly and check for a good fit every time.

Facial hair – stubble and beards – make it impossible to get a good seal of the mask to the face. If you are clean-shaven when wearing tight-fitting masks (i.e. those which rely on a good seal to the face), this will help prevent leakage of contaminated air around the edges of the mask and into your lungs. You will therefore be breathing in clean air, which will help you stay healthy.

If there are good reasons for having a beard (e.g. for religious reasons), alternative forms of RPE, that do not rely on a tight fit to the face, are available.



So HOW do I fit my mask correctly?



For **HALF-FACE** mask

- ✓ Clean shaven at start of your shift
- ✓ Always check the fit before every use:
 - fit around the nose
 - fit around the chin
 - check the position of straps
- ✓ Carry out a 'fit-check'

So HOW do I fit my mask correctly?



For **FULL-FACE** mask

- ✓ Clean shaven at start of your shift
- ✓ Always check the fit before every use:
 - fit around the nose where applicable
 - fit around the chin
 - check the position of straps
- ✓ Carry out a 'fit-check'

REMEMBER:

- Ensure the mask is clean and in good working order before each use
- Carry out a fit check with your mask before each use.
- Do not remove the mask in the hazardous area, e.g.: to talk or inspect your work
- Replace disposable masks and replaceable filters
- Store the mask in a clean area when not being used.

SUMMARY

- Just because you can't see the hazard does NOT mean it is not there
- Always wear your mask when required
- Badly fitting masks don't protect you

**WEAR YOUR MASK AND WEAR IT
CORRECTLY.**