

Pinnacol Pointers for Safety Group Programs

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Contact: Mindy Carrothers (303.361.4790, mindy.carrothers@pinnacol.com)

Breathe Easy With Comprehensive, Compliant Respiratory Protection

Dust, fog, smoke, mist, gases, vapors and sprays — these are common, harmful workplace hazards that can make you sick and may even cause cancer, lung impairment, other diseases or death. For policyholders, these health hazards are a reminder of why it's important to put a work-site respiratory protection program in place. Or assuming you have one, to revisit the program to ensure it's comprehensive and compliant with all the requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Controlling Respiratory Hazards

Here are some methods you can use to control air contaminants at the work site:

Engineering controls — These include a change or alteration of a process; isolation or enclosure of a process or work operation; wet methods; local exhaust or dilution ventilation; and/or good housekeeping. These often can eliminate or reduce exposure to respiratory hazards.

Respiratory protection — Respiratory protection should be considered a method of last resort when engineering controls are not sufficient to achieve acceptable limits of exposure. If engineering controls prove impractical or ineffective, you must provide respirators for employees who are exposed to air concentrations of contaminants exceeding established exposure limits. Respirators are among the most important pieces of protective equipment for working in hazardous environments. Selecting the right respirator requires an assessment of all the workplace operations, processes or environments that may create a respiratory hazard. The identities of the hazard and its airborne concentrations need to be determined before choosing a respirator. This assessment should be done by experienced safety personnel or by an industrial hygienist.

Developing a Respiratory Protection Program

In any workplace where respirators are necessary to protect the health of the employee, or whenever respirators are required by the employer, the employer should establish and implement a written respiratory protection program with work-site-specific procedures. The program should be updated as necessary to reflect those changes in workplace conditions that affect respirator use.

The OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard also requires the employer to establish and retain written information regarding medical evaluations, fit testing and the respirator program. This information will facilitate employee involvement in the respirator program, assist the employer in auditing the adequacy of the program and provide a record for compliance determinations by OSHA. [The OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard](#) outlines the required elements of a respiratory protection program.

To learn more about what's required in a comprehensive, compliant respiratory protection program in the workplace, visit the Resources page at Pinnacol.com. There you can download a sample respiratory protection program and learn more about respirators and OSHA requirements. Or call Pinnacol's Safety On Call hotline at 303-361-4700. We're ready to answer questions and help you take next steps so you and your co-workers can breathe easy.

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