# Respirators

Over three million workers wear respirators on the job every day. You've likely worn a respirator on the jobsite in situations where you're handling hazardous chemicals, working in dangerously dusty environments, or working in confined spaces like silos, boilers, tanks, or sewers. We wear respirators in hazardous atmospheres to prevent breathing problems, lung damage, and death.

A respirator is a type of PPE that covers your nose and mouth, or sometimes your entire face or head. Most respirators filter the air you inhale so harmful dust, fog, smoke, fumes, gases, vapors, and mists don't get into your mouth, nose, and lungs. If you have to work in an environment where there isn't enough oxygen, or where the air is extremely hazardous, you may have to wear an atmosphere-supplying respirator. These respirators provide you with clean air to breathe, either from a tank or another location.

**You need to receive thorough training** on how to properly select, use, and maintain respirators for the type of hazard you face. Your training should include: **1)** understanding the company's respiratory protection program, **2)** identifying hazards, and **3)** understanding the respirator's use, purpose, and limitations. Because different hazards require different respirators, you must wear the right one for the job in order to be protected.

**Before you can use a respirator,** you need your doctor's okay, and you need to have a fit test to make sure you can get a good seal when you put on the respirator.

**A proper fit is key to your safety.** If the respirator doesn't fit properly, it can allow you to inhale hazardous gases, or could cause your glasses to fog up so that you can't see.

**Keep your respirator in good working condition.** Never alter a respirator. Learn how to inspect; maintain; clean; and properly put on, remove, and check the seals of your respirator.

**A respirator should not create new hazards.** The right respirator should not impair your ability to see, hear, communicate, move, or perform your work safely.

**Remember that the respirator does not eliminate the hazard.** Maintenance and proper use are critical. If the respirator you're wearing fails or you take it off (even for just a moment), you will be in danger. Depending upon your situation, a failure could mean that you inhale poison or don't get enough oxygen to survive. If you can't breathe well, you could experience an increased breathing rate, an accelerated heartbeat, impaired thinking, and loss of coordination. Now take a moment to think about all of the dangerous tasks you perform and what could happen if you were to become dizzy or lose your balance. So, even a simple task like climbing a ladder could become deadly if your respirator stops working, if you remove it to itch your nose, or if the seal against your face is broken.

**SAFETY REMINDER**

**Beards and dental work can adversely affect your fit test.**

## NOTES:

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# Concussion

Concussion is now taken so seriously that even top athletes will miss important games in order to recover properly. The NFL has a concussion procedure for football players who are involved in helmet-to-helmet hits or who suffer a head injury. Some grade school and high school districts prohibit students with concussions from participating in any activities. There are no nationwide rules for handling concussions in the construction industry; however, you can be proactive: **1)** learn about concussions and what to do if you suffer a head injury, and **2)** protect your brain. So, let's get started.

**Understand concussions and their effects.** A concussion is a traumatic brain injury that occurs when a blow to the head makes your brain bounce around inside your skull. The bouncing can bruise the brain and change the way it works. The effects are usually temporary and can include headaches and problems with concentration, balance, memory, and coordination. These symptoms can make it difficult to work safely, or even perform the routine tasks of everyday life. While concussions can cause a loss of consciousness, most do not. But every concussion does cause damage to the brain and the injury needs time and rest to heal properly. With proper medical treatment, most people with mild concussions recover fully.

**Know the symptoms of a concussion.** They include: headache or pressure in the head; temporary loss of consciousness; confusion or fogginess; amnesia; dizziness; seeing stars; ringing in the ears; nausea; vomiting; slurred speech; delayed response to questions; and fatigue. If you have any of these symptoms in the hours or days after a blow to the head, see your doctor.

**Don't accept head injuries as part of the job.** Many construction workers think they're supposed to take the bumps and lumps, swallow some aspirin, and get back to work. That thinking is wrong. There is no good reason that you should ever get hurt on this job. If you do get hurt, especially if it's a head injury, report it immediately. Similarly, don't even accept the unnecessary risk of a head injury. Watch for and avoid head injury hazards. Don't walk under elevated work surfaces like aerial lifts, scissor lifts, or scaffolds. Don't walk or stand below people working on a roof. Mark low beams, ducts, and pipes with caution tape.

**Prevent concussions.** Slips, trips, falls, and blows to the head can all cause concussions. So, to prevent concussions, watch your step, keep the site neat and clean, and don't let tools or materials fall from heights. Store materials and parts well away from floor edges, so they can't fall on someone below. Always wear a hard hat on the job. A ball cap or wool hat provides no protection against head injuries. Wear your hard hat as it is supposed to be worn, and never make any alterations to it.

**SAFETY REMINDER**

**Replace damaged PPE. If your hard hat is cracked, or if the treads on your boots are worn, it's time to go shopping.**

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# Cold Weather Safety

Now that the cold weather is here, we all need to understand the hazards of working in cold temperatures. Prolonged exposure to the cold is dangerous and can result in health problems like hypothermia, frostbite, trench foot, and chilblains. Snow and ice also create physical hazards. Knowing the facts about cold weather and following a few simple guidelines can help ensure that you stay safe and healthy until warm weather arrives.

Before you even get to the jobsite, you have to get out of the house and into your vehicle. Watch out for slippery areas. A fall on slippery ice or snow can make for a bad day, and cause a sprain, strain, or even broken bones. Falls can happen anywhere—a driveway, sidewalk, or parking lot.

Slow down when driving on snow and ice. Keep extra space between you and the vehicle in front of you. Be cautious on overpasses—they may freeze sooner than the road does.

On the job, you should avoid exposure to extreme temperatures whenever possible. But when cold weather can't be avoided, follow these recommendations to protect yourself from health problems and injuries:

**Wear appropriate clothing.** Wear several layers of loose clothing. Layers provide better insulation and you can adjust to changing conditions. Remember that tight clothing reduces blood circulation and you need that warm blood circulating to your extremities. Clothing that is too tight or too bulky can also restrict your movement and create other hazards.

**Protect your ears, face, hands, and feet.** Keep your feet dry. Your boots should be waterproof and insulated. Keep an extra pair of wool socks handy in case your socks get wet during the day. Wear a hat that covers your ears so body heat doesn't escape from your head. A hat will make your whole body feel warmer. Use a hard hat liner under your hard hat. Wear good gloves and consider using hand warmers.

**Follow safe work practices.** Take frequent, short breaks in a warm, dry location to let your body warm up. Avoid touching cold metal surfaces with bare skin. Stay hydrated. Drink warm beverages but avoid beverages that contain caffeine and (of course) alcohol; both will actually reduce your body's ability to stay warm. Schedule outdoor tasks for the warmer part of the day.

**Keep an eye on your co-workers and ask them to watch out for you.** Look for signs of hypothermia including uncontrolled shivering, slurred speech, drowsiness, loss of coordination, confusion, disorientation, weakness, and unconsciousness. Very low body temperature affects the brain, which makes it difficult to move and hard to think clearly. If you experience any of these symptoms, get inside, warm up, and call 911 immediately.

**SAFETY REMINDER**

**Be prepared. Keep your vehicle winter-ready: full gas tank, clean windows, jumper cables, tire chains, a shovel, a blanket, a flashlight, and a granola bar or energy bar.**

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# The Fatal Four

The Fatal Four, or The Focus Four, are the four types of accidents that cause over half of construction fatalities every year. The Fatal Four are: **1)** falls, **2)** electrocutions, **3)** struck-by-objects, and **4)** caught-in or caught-between objects. The good news is that fatal accidents can be avoided. Let's consider what you can do so you don't become a Fatal Four statistic.

**Falls** are still the leading cause of death in the construction industry. They account for 35% of all construction-related deaths. Preventing falls could save over 400 lives each year—one of them could be yours. The first step in preventing falls is to avoid putting yourself at risk. Keep away from open-sided floors, unprotected edges, unguarded elevator shafts, and open mechanical shafts. Anytime you are six feet up or higher, make sure fall protection is in place. Keep yourself behind a physical barrier such as a guardrail or be sure that you're wearing a fall harness and that you're properly tied off. If any guardrails are damaged or missing, they need to be fixed right away. Choose the right ladder. Always inspect it before you use it, and place it on a level and stable surface.

**Electrocutions** can be avoided. Coming in contact with a live power line can kill you. Look up and check for overhead power lines. Have all buried utilities marked before you dig. Keep a safe distance away from power lines and keep a safe distance away from heavy equipment that is operating near power lines. Read and follow lockout/tagout procedures. Working on energized systems is strictly prohibited unless you are trained to do so. Respect electricity; don't be complacent, even if it's "only" 120-volt house service. Use double-insulated tools or a GFCI. Inspect cords for cuts, damaged insulation, exposed wires, and missing ground prongs. We've all used a tool or a cord that we know we shouldn't have. Since we're here, we must have been lucky. Don't trust Lady Luck with your life—don't use damaged cords and tools; replace them.

**Struck-by-object** accidents cause almost 10% of construction fatalities. First, prevent falling objects. Make sure that toeboards are installed. Keep material away from the edges of floors and scaffolds. Second, don't get hit. Avoid working under scaffolds and aerial lifts. Watch for moving equipment and vehicles. Listen for back-up alarms. Do we need to say it? Always wear your hard hat!

**Caught-in or caught-between accidents** happen when workers are caught in or crushed by equipment or objects. Stay outside of the swing radius of heavy equipment like cranes and backhoes. Never put yourself between a fixed object and a moving object. Don't enter an unprotected trench. It only takes a second—literally—to get buried under tons of soil.

You can avoid the Fatal Four: pay attention, think, make good decisions, and stay alive.

**SAFETY REMINDER**

**Identify risks. Control hazards. Prevent accidents.**

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