



ILA-USMX JOINT SAFETY COMMITTEE

OSH Circular 2016-02 (21 March 2016)

Wearing a Respirator Voluntarily?

What You Should Know First.



The ILA~USMX Joint Safety Committee has taken notice that there are a growing number of waterfront workers who voluntarily wear a respirator to protect themselves against potential airborne contaminants in the workplace. As a policy matter, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) advocates for workers who wish to protect themselves in that manner, even if the levels of potential contaminants in their breathing zones aren't reaching the levels which require employers to provide mandatory respiratory protection.

When such voluntary respiratory protection is undertaken, however, an employer still has a legal obligation to make the employee aware of the content of **29 CFR 1910.134 [Appendix D]**. It says:

Respirators are an effective method of protection against designated hazards when properly selected and worn. Respirator use is encouraged, even when exposures are below the exposure limit, to provide an additional level of comfort and protection for workers. However, if a respirator is used improperly or not kept clean, the respirator itself can become a hazard to the worker. Sometimes, workers may wear respirators to avoid exposures to hazards, even if the amount of hazardous substance does not exceed the limits set by OSHA standards. If your employer provides respirators for your voluntary use, or if you provide your own respirator, you need to take certain precautions to be sure that the respirator itself does not present a hazard.

You should do the following:

- 1. Read and heed all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirators limitations.**
- 2. Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern. NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, certifies respirators. A label or statement of certification should appear on the respirator or respirator packaging. It will tell you what the respirator is designed for and how much it will protect you.**
- 3. Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors, or very small solid particles of fumes or smoke.**
- 4. Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.**

Working Together For The Benefit Of All

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