

## Asbestos-related work and beards/ facial hair

At the Asbestos Management Training Workshops delivered by Local Government NSW (LGNSW) during 2013, councils inquired whether workers with beards or facial hair should be undertaking asbestos-related work and how beards affect the selection of respiratory protective equipment.

LGNSW recommends that workers undertaking asbestos-related work such as asbestos removal are clean shaven in the region of the respiratory protective equipment (RPE). If a worker has a beard or facial hair in the region of the RPE and the hair may affect the seal of the RPE then it is not recommended that the worker undertakes asbestos-related work.

Information can be found in the *Code of Practice How to Safely Remove Asbestos* including:

- Selection of suitable RPE.
- Personal decontamination procedures.
- Fit testing of face pieces.

The *Code of Practice How to Safely Remove Asbestos* is available at:

<http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/formspublications/publications/Documents/how-to-safely-remove-asbestos-code-of-practice-3561.pdf>

The information below has been extracted from the *Code of Practice How to Safely Remove Asbestos* to assist councils:

### RESPIRATORY PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (RPE)

The selection of suitable RPE depends on the nature of the asbestos removal work, the probable maximum concentrations of asbestos fibres expected and any personal characteristics of the wearer that may affect the facial fit of the respirator (for example, facial hair and glasses). [Page 31]

A fit test should be performed to ensure the RPE fits the individual and provides a good face seal between the worker's skin and the face piece. [Page 32]

### PERSONAL DECONTAMINATION PROCEDURES

Personal hygiene and careful washing are essential. Particular attention should be paid to the hands, fingernails, face and head. [Page 34]

### SELECTION OF RPE

The most efficient respirator and filter for the task should be used. Proper fit is critical; a disposable half-face respirator is especially difficult. Consideration should be given to upgrading to a non-disposable half-face respirator.

Table 2 provides guidance for the selection of appropriate respiratory protection for different tasks, assuming the correct work procedures are being followed. This table does not take into account personal features including facial hair or where glasses are worn. Full protection cannot be achieved if either of these factors interferes with the face seal.

Workers should be consulted on the selection of RPE to ensure individual fit and medical factors have been considered. [Page 58]

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## **FIT TESTING OF FACE PIECES**

The performance of RPE depends on a good contact between the wearer's skin and the face seal of the mask so that the mask is a tight-fitting face piece or full mask. A good face seal can only be achieved if the wearer is clean-shaven in the region of the seal and the face piece is the correct size and shape to fit the wearer's face.

Workers using negative-pressure respirators should also be clean-shaven to ensure a good face seal. Workers with beards, stubble or facial hair should use a continuous-flow positive pressure respirator. [Page 59]

## **Further information**

For further information on personal protective equipment for workers, please contact WorkCover NSW:

WorkCover Information Centre Phone: 13 10 50

Website: [www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

## **Disclaimer**

This information should be read in conjunction with relevant legislation, guidelines and codes of practice. In the case of any discrepancies, the most recent legislation should prevail.

This information does not constitute legal advice. Legal advice should be sought in relation to particular circumstances and liability will not be accepted for losses incurred as a result of reliance on this information.