

RPE and Face-Fit Testing

The area where most firms fail an inspection

Scope and limitations — read before use

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1. RPE is the last line, never the first

If your control strategy is a mask, you do not have a control strategy. RPE is used to deal with the residual exposure after water, extraction and enclosure have done their work. An inspector who sees masks doing the heavy lifting will look very hard at everything else.

2. Selecting the right RPE

Situation	Typical minimum	Notes
General workshop with good wet controls	FFP3 disposable or half mask with P3 filters	Assigned protection factor 20
Higher exposure tasks, or where controls are less certain	Powered respirator with hood or visor, TH2 or TH3	APF 20 to 40. No face seal needed, so beards are not a problem
Filter changes, LEV maintenance, cleaning slurry	At least the same as the highest task RPE	Often forgotten — these are peak exposure moments
Installation on a customer's premises	Same standard as the workshop	Do not drop standards because you are in somebody's kitchen

Select on the basis of your assessment and the manufacturer's data. Where in doubt take competent advice — over-specifying is far cheaper than a silicosis claim.

3. Face-fit testing — the non-negotiables

- Every wearer of TIGHT-FITTING RPE must be face-fit tested, for the specific make, model and size they will wear.
- Testing must be done by a competent tester, and the result recorded.
- Re-test if the wearer's face changes significantly — notable weight change, dental work, facial surgery — and if the make or model changes.
- FACIAL HAIR AT THE SEAL DEFEATS THE MASK. Stubble is enough. A worker who will not be clean shaven must be given a powered hood or visor that does not rely on a face seal.
- Wearers must fit-check every single time they put the mask on. Train them to do it.
- A mask that has never been fit tested provides unknown, possibly zero, protection, and an inspector will treat it as no protection at all.

4. Face-fit test register

Name	RPE make, model and size	Test date	Tester	Result P/F	Retest due	Clean shaven policy signed

5. RPE maintenance record (reusable masks and powered units)

Item / ID	User	Cleaned	Filters changed	Battery / airflow checked	Inspected by	Next due

Disposable masks are single shift. Reusable RPE needs a documented cleaning, inspection and filter change regime, and powered units need airflow checks before each use.

Assessed by	Signature	Date	Review date
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