

## Respiratory Protective Equipment

Respiratory protective equipment (RPE) is used to prevent you from inhaling hazardous substances in the workplace. When used correctly, RPE can help to prevent you from developing serious irreversible diseases which can be caused by inhaling respirable dust.

The most common RPE used in the workplace are tight fitting masks such as disposable masks, reusable half-masks and full face masks.

Disposable mask



Half face mask



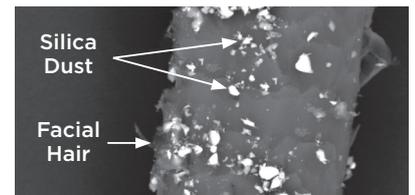
Full face mask



### FACIAL HAIR

Effective use of these masks relies on achieving a good seal between the mask and your face. Facial hair can prevent this seal from properly forming, leaving gaps around the edges where dust can enter and be inhaled. This includes beards, moustaches, sideburns and stubble.

Research shows that the protection provided by a mask is significantly reduced as facial hair grows, so it is important for you to be clean shaven whenever you need to wear RPE.



Male facial hair sized in relation to silica dust. Image generated using Scanning Electron Microscope.

### FIT TESTING

We all come in different shapes and sizes, so each person needs to have a face mask that fits them properly – no one size fits all. Fit testing is used to make sure that your mask fits your individual face and achieves a tight seal to keep dust out.

You should check that your RPE fits properly every time you use it. You should also have a new fit test conducted if you:

- > lose or gain weight.
- > have any significant dental work completed.
- > develop any facial changes around the mask seal area.
- > start using a new make or model of mask.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

- > Always wear your RPE – even if you are only performing a quick task.
- > Make sure you're wearing it correctly.
- > Look after your RPE – check it, clean it and change the filters regularly if it's not disposable.
- > Store RPE in a clean, dry area.

### YOUR WORKPLACE

- > Workers should be educated on the importance of RPE, and how to use it correctly.
- > The right RPE should be available for the job and you should always use it
- > A 'competent person' should be nominated to undertake fit testing.

This general awareness fact sheet is part of a range of materials prepared by the IQA. Further resources are available, including a workshop. For details contact [education@quarry.com.au](mailto:education@quarry.com.au)

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