

Respirator Seal Problems: Resolve the Leak Before Exposure

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Why this matters

A previous fit test does not establish today's seal. A changed facepiece, damaged strap or interfering hair can leave protection incomplete before the task begins.

Objective: Recognize a failed seal and obtain correction before exposure.

Key hazards or failure points

Wrong model or size; damaged seals or valves; interfering facial hair; rushed donning; adjusting in contaminated air.

Practical controls

- Use the program-selected respirator and confirm required medical evaluation, training and fit testing through the program. Do not substitute a similar-looking model.
- Inspect the actual facepiece, straps, valves and connections using its instructions. Resolve damage or interfering conditions through the respiratory-program administrator.
- Don in a safe area and perform the required user seal check every time. A failed check means no exposure until corrected.

Verify It in the Field

Match the facepiece identity with the approved selection and fit-test record. Confirm readiness without placing private medical details on the crew sheet.

Follow the program's Appendix B-1 or equally effective manufacturer seal-check procedure. A coworker may observe the method but cannot certify fit by looking.

Identify the safe exit and replacement arrangement. If leakage occurs during work, leave the exposure area safely before correcting or removing the respirator.

Stop and reassess

Hold for a failed seal, damage, interference or an unapproved replacement. Leave exposure for leakage or breathing difficulty; notify the responsible person and complete required correction before return.

Ask the crew

1. What changed since the fit test?
2. Which seal-check method applies?
3. Where will we resolve a leak?

Use this HOP tool — Procedure use and adherence: With clean equipment in a safe area, locate the actual donning and seal-check instructions. Ask the wearer to explain the failure response before demonstrating the approved check. If the method cannot be followed, hold use and obtain program guidance rather than improvising.

Sources: OSHA 1910.134, 1926.103; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 20–21. HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/respirator-seal-problems