

Respirator Cartridges: Check the Change Schedule

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Why this matters

A cartridge can look clean after its useful service life ends. Today's chemical, concentration, workload or storage history may differ from the conditions behind yesterday's selection.

Objective: Confirm cartridge identity and replacement timing before use.

Key hazards or failure points

Wrong cartridge; unknown use history; missed replacement; changed exposure; smell used as the change schedule.

Practical controls

- Have the respiratory program select protection for the assessed contaminant and conditions. A particulate filter alone does not remove gases or vapors.
- For applicable gas/vapor cartridges, use the required suitable end-of-service-life indicator or documented, data-based change schedule. Do not invent a daily rule.
- Follow program instructions for use tracking, storage and replacement. Keep suitable replacements available and change components outside the exposure area.

Verify It in the Field

Read actual cartridge identifiers and compare them with the task selection. Check approved component compatibility, condition and manufacturer restrictions.

Locate the applicable replacement instruction and required use-history record. Confirm when this set must change; an unopened shelf-life date is not an in-use schedule.

Ask the program designee whether today's chemical, duration and conditions remain covered. Hold uncertain changes for reassessment before exposure.

Stop and reassess

Leave exposure safely for breakthrough, leakage or breathing resistance. Hold use for unknown history, missing schedule or changed conditions not assessed. Report and correct the problem before reentry; do not wait to smell a contaminant.

Ask the crew

1. Which schedule covers this cartridge?
2. How is use tracked?
3. What change invalidates its basis?

Use this HOP tool — Validate assumptions: Write the statement "this cartridge still has useful life" on paper. Identify the record and conditions that would support it. Have the program designee resolve missing evidence before use; previous successful work and lack of odor do not close the question.

Sources: OSHA 1910.134, 1926.103; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 22–23. 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-cartridge-change-schedule