



## Standard Interpretations

### 02/06/2006 - Facial hair and voluntary use of filtering facepiece respirators.

[← Standard Interpretations - Table of Contents](#)

• **Standard Number:** [1910.134](#); [1910.134\(a\)](#); [1910.134\(c\)\(2\)\(ii\)](#)

February 6, 2006

Mr. Gordon C. Miller  
Lawrence Livermore Laboratory  
P.O. Box 808 (L-379)  
Livermore, California 94550

Dear Mr. Miller:

Thank you for your March 29, 2004 letter to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Directorate of Enforcement Programs, concerning the voluntary use of filtering facepiece respirators. This letter constitutes OSHA's interpretation only of the requirements discussed and may not be applicable to any questions or situations not delineated within your original correspondence. Your questions are repeated below along with our response.

**Question #1:** Does a principal employer have an obligation to prohibit the voluntary use of filtering facepieces by workers who have beards or other facial hair that interfere with the functioning of the filtering facepieces? Does an employer have an obligation to prohibit the voluntary use of filtering facepieces by contractor employees working on the principal employer's premises who have beards or other facial hair that interfere with the functioning of the filtering facepieces?

**Response:** No, the voluntary use of respirators **in atmospheres which are not hazardous** does not require the mask to be fit tested or the wearer to maintain a tight fit, so beards that could interfere with the face seal or functioning of filtering facepieces would be not be prohibited by the standard.

**Question #2:** Does an employer have an obligation to ensure that a voluntarily used filtering facepiece is properly donned in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and worn properly (e.g., can the employer prohibit using a filtering facepiece if the user cuts off one of the straps)? Does an employer have an obligation to ensure that a voluntarily used filtering facepiece of a contractor employees working on the principal employer's premises is properly donned in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and worn properly (e.g., can the employer prohibit using a filtering facepiece if the user cuts off one of the straps)?

**Response:** The standard does not require employers to ensure that workers, voluntarily using filtering facepiece respirators **in atmospheres which are not hazardous**, wear these respirators according to the manufacturers' instructions, as long as the use of the mask itself is not creating a hazard. Employers may, however, prohibit such misuse as part of their respirator program.

**Question #3:** If an industrial hygienist specifies or suggests using a filtering facepiece respirator for situations where exposures above a permissible exposure limit (PEL) will not occur, is this considered a voluntary use of a respirator?

**Response:** If an industrial hygienist responsible for the safety and health of employees in a company **requires** a respirator to be worn in a particular area, even when airborne contaminants are determined to be below all PELs or other recognized exposure limits, any

respirator use would not be considered voluntary.

**Question #4:** If the industrial hygienist allows or agrees to the use of a filtering facepiece, is this a voluntary use of a respirator?

**Response:** If an industrial hygienist **allows** the voluntary use of a respirator to be worn in the workplace and all airborne contaminants are below OSHA PELs or other recognized exposure limits, the respirator use would still be considered voluntary.

**Question #5:** Is there an occasion when a filtering facepiece respirator is not a "dust mask" per 29 CFR 1910.134(c)(2)(ii)?

**Response:** The Respiratory Protection standard considers the terms "filtering facepieces" and "dust masks" to be synonymous.

Thank you for your interest in occupational safety and health. We hope you find this information helpful. OSHA requirements are set by statute, standards, and regulations. Our interpretation letters explain these requirements and how they apply to particular circumstances, but they cannot create additional employer obligations. This letter constitutes OSHA's interpretation of the requirements discussed. Our enforcement guidance may be affected by changes to OSHA rules. Also, from time to time we update our guidance in response to new information. To keep apprised of such developments, you can consult the OSHA website at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov). If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the Office of Health Enforcement at (202) 693-2190.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Fairfax, Director  
Directorate of Enforcement Programs

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[← Standard Interpretations - Table of Contents](#)

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[▲ Back to Top](#)

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