

Interim Policy Recommendation

Assigned Protection Factors for Air-Supplied or Powered Respirators

Currently, there is no harmonised approach within the EU on the appropriate application of assigned protection factors (APFs) for Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) and an expert group has been set up to review this and make recommendations.

In the interim, the Authority has examined the available options and, mindful of employees' health and safety and industry's needs, the Authority adopts the interim policy approach as outlined below which will remain in place until either the EU¹ or ISO² issues new standards or guidance or new scientific data is published on the use of RPE protection factors. Having completed an impact analysis of the various options the Authority recommends the following:

1. Where employers can demonstrate that they have developed a sound protocol for deriving in-house protection factors for powered or air-supplied respirators, the Authority allows the use of such workplace protection factors (WPF) which may be:
 - a. A Workplace Protection Factor (WPF) study, conducted under actual conditions of use in the workplace, that measures the protection provided by a properly selected, fit tested, and functioning respirator, when the respirator is worn correctly and used as part of a comprehensive respirator programme or
 - b. A simulated Workplace Protection Factor (SWPF) study - a study conducted in a controlled laboratory setting. This type of study is designed to determine the optimum performance of respirators by reducing the impact of sources of variability through maintenance of tightly controlled study conditions.
2. The study protocols must be in line with the requirements of I.S. EN 529:2005 Respiratory Protective Devices – Recommendations for Selection, Use, Care and Maintenance – Guidance Document (NSAI) or the (US) Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Assigned Protection Factors for the Revised Respiratory Protection Standard, OSHA 3352-02-2009.
3. No workplace derived assigned protection factor, as per the OSHA guidance, *OSHA 3352-02-2009*, can exceed 1,000, even where the study demonstrates a level of protection far in excess of 1,000.
4. Employers must ensure that all the elements of a robust respiratory protection programme are put in place at the workplace. In particular, written operating procedures (SOPs) must include the selection, fit-testing, medical evaluation, training, maintenance/repair of the RPE, with proper supervision in place and the relevant elements must be part of the written risk assessment as required by Section 19 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005.

These recommendations apply to air-supplied or powered respirators only.

Occupational Hygiene Unit
Health and Safety Authority
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¹ European Union

² International Standards Organisation