



Facial Hair & Respirators

*The effects of facial hair or beards is a common issue wherever respirators are worn. Does it matter?
The answer is clear - Beards are not acceptable if close fitting respirators are worn.*

AS/NZS1715¹ Section 8.3 tells us "...individuals who have stubble (even a few days' growth will cause excessive leakage of contaminant), a moustache, sideburns, or a beard which passes between the skin and the sealing surface should not wear a respirator which requires a facial seal."

The Industrial Relations Commission ordered four flight attendants to shave off their beards (Melbourne, December 1993). Attendants are required to wear full facepiece respirators to fight aircraft fires if the need arises. A beard would likely interfere with the safe use of their respirators².

What is the problem with beards?

Close fitting respirators need to seal tightly to the face. Gaps in this face seal let the dirty air leak inside the respirator. Respirator filters cannot clean the air leaking through the face seal. Even a day or two's growth of stubble for some individuals can be enough to give significant leak paths for contaminants. Face seal leakage reduces the wearer's protection.

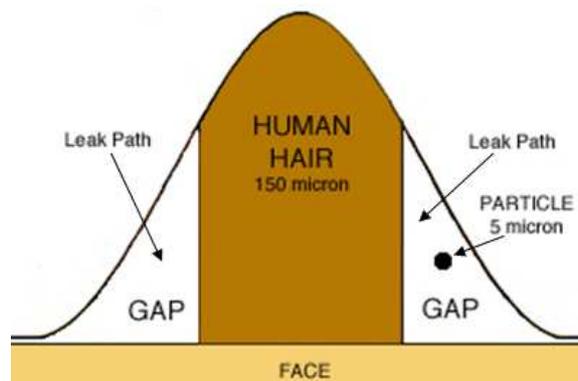
It is not true to say that hair is "very fine" and aids the filtering process. The size of particles that is most dangerous to the lungs is far too small to be caught by a few human hairs.

What is the solution?

Individuals with facial hair that does interfere with face fit need to wear loose fitting respirators with an air supply. These allow for the whole head to be covered and the seal to be under the chin or around the neck. A Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) with suitable filters or a supplied airline system, with a hood or helmet style head top as needed, can be worn by these individuals to give the necessary respiratory protection.

¹ AS/NZS1715:2009 Selection, use and maintenance of respiratory protective devices."

² Source: SafetyLine 23, July 1994



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