

The ISRP Forum—

Pertinent Discussions in Respiratory Protection

David Lewis, Jr is a bearded CIH who takes his duties to protect the health of employees seriously. He recommends the use of respirators where necessary, understands the need for a good respirator program and the importance of a good fit when using a tight-fitting face piece. He enforces the rules, and yet wonders why must we continue to say:

Shave Your Beard or Lose Your Job!

David P. Lewis, Jr.
CIH

This is a message that many industrial hygienists are being asked to help deliver. Management must enforce the "no beards and respirators" policies, but the industrial hygienist must provide the rationale from both a technical and regulatory perspective.

It is my opinion that we need to quit trying to develop a rationale for an unworkable and unreasonable "no beards" policy and begin working on better solutions to the problems.

The "no beards and respirators" rules and policies have developed out of a need to protect the worker but with a lack of respiratory protection technology. In the recent past, powered air-purifying respirators (PAPRs), have provided some relief for workers in dusty environments. However, their effectiveness (over-breathing problems) is still debated by professionals in the field.

Workers exposed to most other toxic environments that are not readily controlled with engineering or administrative controls, are still faced with having to wear a respirator with a tight-fitting facepiece.

Increased concern about worker exposures to airborne toxic substances, new regulations, asbestos removal and hazardous waste site cleanup efforts, along with other toxic material issues, result in the need to

have more and more individuals capable of wearing tight-fitting respirators.

Concern over beards is a small but very significant part of this issue. What about concerns over eyeglasses? Do spectacle kits really work? Is it all right to wear contact lenses?

Let us go beyond beards and eyeglasses. Even without these concerns, the respirator wearer is faced with an extremely uncomfortable piece of equipment strapped to his or her face. If it is not properly fitted and in the correct position on the face, leaks in the seal may expose the wearer to significant levels of toxic dusts, vapors, and gases.

What do we as professionals in the field do about it? The ideal solution is to remove the toxic environment, or remove the need for any individuals to enter these environments. If we assume there will continue to be a need to wear a respirator, we need to look for alternative respiratory-protection solutions.

What about loose-fitting systems such as air supplied hoods? These systems should be acceptable protective systems for bearded employees, but their use is not stressed. What are the problems in using this system with PAPR technology? Are there pump and battery technology problems, filter technology prob-

lems, litigation concerns by respirator manufacturers, or regulatory paralysis?

Mouthpiece respirators are already available for escape purposes. Can they be modified to provide a beard or eyeglass wearer with an alternative respirator?

I am not a respirator expert. I am a frustrated, beard-wearing, industrial hygienist who has been required to shave in the past and will probably shave in the future to do my job. Even without my beard, I am getting tired of putting forth the weak technical ar-

guments against the alternative technical solutions. Are respirator manufacturers going to wait for a respirator that is developed by a beard-wearing worker? I would like to challenge the experts (respirator users, industrial hygienists, safety professionals, engineers, respirator manufacturers, and regulators) to aggressively pursue a solution to this problem.

I would like to close by asking the question in a different way:

What would you do if it was illegal to require a person to shave in order to work in your facility?