



State has duty to keep workers safe; Facial hair compromises protective seal on respiratory masks

Yes, our employer has the legal duty and obligation to require essential staff to wear a securely fitted surgical N95 mask for our safety and protection and for those around us. A tight face-to-respirator seal provides greater protection from airborne hazards, in this case, the coronavirus. Studies have shown that any amount of facial hair within the seal area can compromise the seal.

shown that even a day or two of stubble can begin to reduce protection. Research tells us that the presence of facial hair under the sealing surface causes 20 to 1000 times more leakage compared to clean-shaven individuals.

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Gases, vapors, and particles in the air will take the path of least resistance and bypass the part of the respirator that captures or filters hazards out. So then, why can't facial hair act as a crude filter to capture particles that pass between the respirator sealing area and the skin? While human hair appears to be very thin to the naked eye, hair is much larger in size than the particles inhaled. Facial hair is just not dense enough, and the individual hairs are too large to capture particles like an air filter does; nor will a beard trap gases and vapors like the carbon bed in a respirator cartridge. Therefore, the vast majority of particles, gases, and vapors follow the air stream right through the facial hair and into the respiratory tract of the wearer. In fact, some studies have

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration strongly advises employees to be clean-shaven (within eight hours) in the area of the seal before they begin their shift.

ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a religious reason or a documented medical condition, such as a heart condition, lung disease, or a psychological condition like claustrophobia, you can make an accommodation request. Requests for religious and disability accommodations are typically made to the Equal Employment Opportunity coordinator at a facility. If there is a different process at your facility, contact Human Resources, and inquire what the procedure is for accommodations. If you have questions or are not sure about the local procedures, contact your local union representatives for assistance.

