

Protecting workers from breathing hazards



Workplace hazards come in many forms. In some workplaces, there is a risk to workers from breathing hazards – either airborne contaminants or air that is low in oxygen.

Air contaminants and oxygen deficiency can affect your health in a number of ways. Some breathing hazards cause minor health problems, others are life-threatening.

Workers may not be aware of any health effects while they are exposed, but certain contaminants can have immediate effects, long-term effects, or both:

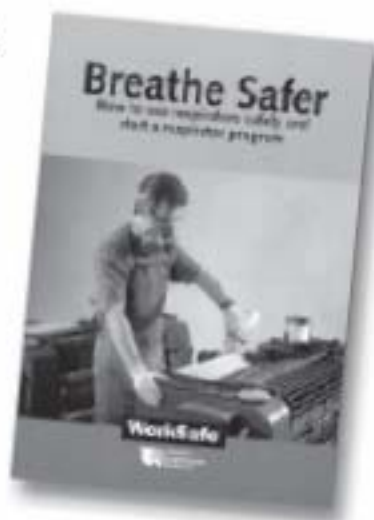
- **Brain** – Lack of oxygen can damage your brain and cause your heart to stop after a few minutes. In slightly reduced levels of oxygen, you will feel dizzy and your heart will speed up. Some gases and vapours can damage your nervous system as well as your brain.
- **Airways** – Particulates, gases, and vapours can irritate your nose, throat, and upper airways. Gases and vapours get deep into your lungs, where they can damage your lung tissue and cause serious health problems. If particulates are the right size, they can also enter the lungs.
- **Bloodstream and internal organs** – Some particulates, gases, and vapours can pass from your lungs into your bloodstream. Once in your blood, they can damage your internal organs.

Most breathing hazards in the workplace can be reduced or eliminated by substitution, engineering controls, or administrative controls. In some cases, however, respirators are the only means to protect workers.

There are many types of respirators available on the market. It is important to choose the right respirator and the right filtering medium for the breathing hazards in your workplace.

The WCB manual *Breathe Safer* can show you how to use respirators safely and how to start a respirator program.

To order a copy, contact WCB Publications and Videos, E-mail pubvid@wcb.bc.ca, fax 604 279-7406, or call 604 276-3068 (toll-free in B.C. 1 800 661-2112, local 3068).



WorkSafe™ courses

Six one-day WorkSafe education courses are offered at more than 50 post-secondary and school district campuses, including all community colleges, around B.C.:

- Joint Health and Safety Committee Training
- Supervisor Safety Management
- Hazard Recognition and Control
- Occupational Health and Safety in Small Business
- Preventing Workplace Violence

- Investigating and Controlling Sprains and Strains

Contact a participating campus for information about schedules or fees, or to register for a course. For the phone number of your local provider, download the WorkSafe Education Network listing from WorkSafe™ online at www.worksafebc.com/pubs/coursetrain/Participating_campus.pdf, or call the Prevention Information Line at 604 276-3100, toll-free in B.C. at 1 888 621-SAFE (7233).

