



## WorkSafeBC confirms annual N95 fit-testing needed to protect health workers

WorkSafeBC has denied a request from 13 health care employers, including B.C.'s health authorities, to amend the required annual fit-testing of N95 filtering facepiece respirators (FFRs) to every two years.

In its review of the matter, WorkSafeBC says the employers did not submit compelling proof that varying the provisions set out in the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* (OHSR) section 8.40(2.1)(b) and *Workers Compensation Act* section 164 would properly protect workers from exposure to airborne contaminants, including bio-hazardous materials.

“The result of our review has not provided sufficient evidence that fit-testing for N95 filtering facepiece respirator (FFR) ‘at least once every two years’ as opposed to the regulatory requirement of ‘at least once a year’ will provide the same level of worker safety,” according to WorkSafeBC.

The application was denied “on the basis that the proposal does not afford protection for workers equal to or greater than the protection established by the OHSR provision nor does it have substantially the same purpose and effect.”

One argument for annual testing, as per policy in several other countries – is that people’s facial contours regularly change, including the effects of weight gain or loss, which would modify the way a respirator fits and decrease protection.

In submissions filed by stakeholders – including HEU – the union argued that reducing the required frequency of fit-testing would put workers in jeopardy, adding that risk prevention is strengthened by the annual training and education accompanied by fit-testing.

HEU wrote: “Respiratory training and fit-testing are imperative if the N95 FFR individualized to the worker is expected to provide confidence for the worker’s protection.”

Under the *WCB Act*, employers have the right to appeal the decision.

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