Verifying Shelf Life for NIOSH Approved®
Filtering Facepiece Respirators (FFRs)

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) performs point-of-use (i.e., field location) conformity assessment studies. In a recent study, NIOSH noted numerous challenges that the PPE community experiences when trying to locate FFR shelf life information. NIOSH does not currently require approval holders to designate a shelf life for FFRs, deferring to approval holders to establish shelf life recommendations for their specific product.

ISSUES

• Shelf life information may not be included with product materials or may be difficult for users to find.
• Shelf life recommendations are communicated to respirator users at the approval holder’s discretion. Approval holders may use a variety of communication pathways to convey this information such as the product package, user instructions, or on a website.
• Without a shelf life recommendation, Respiratory Protection Program (RPP) and stockpile managers lack certainty about when a product should no longer be used.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SHELF LIFE ISN’T ON THE PACKAGING OR USER INSTRUCTIONS

• Find the approval number (TC-84A-XXXX), model/part number, and lot number on one of the respirator units, the product packaging, or the approval label included on or in the packaging.
• Review the approval label to identify the name and contact information of the approval holder or private label entity. Contact the approval holder or private label entity with the approval number, model/part number, and lot number to inquire about the product’s shelf life.

ACTIONS TO TAKE TO SUPPORT SHELF LIFE RECOMMENDATIONS

• Once determined, shelf life information should be incorporated into RPPs, stockpile documentation, or other procedures.
• RPPs should include a process that ensures FFRs are used prior to meeting their shelf life (or the shelf life selected by the RPP manager following consultation with the approval holder when a shelf life is not designated). This process can include the use of a “first-in, first-out” approach, where respirators purchased first are used first to minimize the number of respirators in stock reaching or exceeding their shelf life.
• Stockpile managers should clearly mark pallets, cases, or other containers with the date by which the products should be removed from the stockpile.
• Regardless of shelf life information, replace the FFR when damaged, soiled, wet, or difficult to breathe through, in accordance with the OSHA 1910.134 respiratory protection standard.
• Include a shelf life requirement during the procurement process as a purchase specification.

1 The approval label may indicate the involvement of a private label entity (See Special Cautions and Limitations, Section S, and the user instructions).

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