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Non-compliant respiratory protective equipment on the market

This Safety Alert highlights the issue of non-compliant and unapproved respiratory protective equipment being marketed as compliant.

What happened?

Workers in many industries use P2 disposable respirators, commonly known as 'dust masks', to manage the risks around breathing chemicals and dusts like silica and asbestos.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased demand for these dust masks, and as a result, many businesses (PCBUs) have had difficulty obtaining them for their workers. The extra demand has also resulted in non-certified and inadequate respiratory protective equipment (RPE) entering the New Zealand market.

RPE that does not meet approved standards may leave workers unprotected from harmful respiratory risks, and give them a false belief that they are protected.

What we know

In New Zealand, most disposable respirators and filters that give protection against dusts and other particles are classified under the Australian and New Zealand combined Standard *AS/NZS 1716:2012*.

Disposable respirators that cover the nose and mouth should be compliant with *AS/NZS 1716:2012*, and clearly labelled with the manufacturer's name, trade name, or mark, and the filter classification 'P1' or 'P2'.

Many companies that manufacture compliant RPE are certified by an independent body and can be found on the JAS-ANZ Register; they normally have their licence number marked on the packaging in which the RPE is supplied: www.jas-anz.org

There are also international standards for respirators that we consider to be equivalent to *AS/NZS 1716:2012*:

- N95 masks that are rated compliant by the US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- European 'FFP2' masks that are compliant under EN149:2001
- Chinese 'KN95' masks that are compliant under GB2626:2006 (2019).

Some of these respirators are imported to New Zealand.

Our advice

- Before buying RPE, make sure it meets the AS/NZS standard or an accepted international equivalent, especially if you doubt it is compliant.
- Make sure the standard it cites matches the country of origin.
- Check that any product certificates have been issued by a legitimate certifying body – look for a licence number and the manufacturer's name on the certifying body's website.

- Check this NIOSH list for examples of fake respirators: www.cdc.gov
- Make sure workers are trained to use and maintain RPE.
- Make sure workers are fit-tested by a competent person so there's an adequate face seal with their respirator.
- Seek advice from an occupational hygienist from either:
 - the New Zealand Occupational Hygiene Society (NZOHS): nzohs.org.nz
 - the Health and Safety Association of New Zealand (HASANZ) Register: register.hasanz.org.nz

Guidance

- WorkSafe New Zealand *Advice for workers* for the use of RPE as a control measure: worksafe.govt.nz
- Ministry of Health guidance on PPE for COVID-19: www.health.govt.nz

Standards

The following standards are relevant:

- *AS/NZS1716:2012 Respiratory protective devices*
- NIOSH 42 CFR Part 84, Approval of Respiratory Protective Devices
- EN 149:2001+A1:2009 Respiratory protective devices - Filtering half masks to protect against particles - Requirements, testing, marking
- GB 2626-2006 Respiratory protective equipment - non-powered air-purifying particle respirator