

# Healthcare's Challenges with regard to Respiratory Protection

Cheryl Colton

Allina Health, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Allina Health is the largest healthcare organization in Minnesota and consists of multiple hospitals, clinics, homecare/hospice, home oxygen and medical equipment, and ambulance service. The Allina Respiratory Protection program gained more prominence or importance due to outside events. These events were:

- Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and H1N1 pandemic in 2009 resulted in more proactive in planning disasters and stockpiling appropriate supplies
- OSHA enforcement of annual fit testing in healthcare as a result of the removal of the appropriations bill rider in 2008.

Prior to these events, each of the Allina facilities had their own programs and plans resulting in multiple gaps and levels of effectiveness. In 2008, the respiratory protection program was analyzed and steps were taken to standardize the program to make it an effective program that met regulatory requirements.

In order to have a consistent respirator program for all facilities in a large and complex system, multiple challenges had to be overcome. Some challenges included leadership and management support, personnel and material support, interdepartmental cooperation, healthcare worker's perception, maintenance and documentation of the program, and confusion over which government agency protocol had authority when there were conflicts. In addition to these organizational challenges, programmatic challenges had to be overcome such as fit testing and coordinating respirator selection with stock pile. In addition to the airborne infectious agent protection, healthcare also needs to address the respiratory protection needs for maintenance and hazmat employees. Successful interventions will be discussed as well as ongoing issues with respiratory protection within our healthcare system.