

RESPIRATORY PROTECTION AGAINST CHEMICAL WARFARE AGENTS: An Overview of the Experience of the Inspectorate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

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The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is the international watchdog agency that implements the Chemical Weapons Convention to achieve a World free of the threat of chemical warfare. As part of these activities Chemical Weapons Inspectors verify the inventory and destruction of current chemical warfare agents stockpiles the conversion of declared production facilities as well as the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles of the two world wars. At the same time inspectors verify the consistency of industrial chemicals and monitor the non-diversion of chemicals for activities prohibited under the Convention. In the decade since the beginning of the organisation more than 3000 inspections have been conducted in over 80 countries and inspectors are regularly faced with differing respiratory protection needs. These needs require a broad approach to providing respiratory protection solutions for staff that includes chemical weapons and munitions specialists analytical chemists engineers and medical personnel. This has resulted in the development of extensive experience with respiratory protection against chemical warfare agents from the use of filter respirators to self-contained breathing apparatus used in conjunction with a range of protective ensembles. This paper provides an overview of the OPCW s experience in the use of respiratory protection in the course of training of inspectors and during the conduct of inspections. It details how training on respiratory protection is provided in toxic environments using chemical warfare agents (blister and nerve agents) to enable personnel to safely and effectively work in the presence of chemical warfare agents.