

Respiratory Protection of Workers and Citizens in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Respiratory protection is regulated for workers in industries and mining, fire fighters, Self Defense Forces, sailors, medical staffs, fumigation workers, and people escaping from fires in Japan. Citizens often use traditional face masks to keep warm in winter or to protect from influenza or pollen which are neither standardized nor evaluated. However, SARS in 2003 made citizens to look for evaluated face masks. The news and experiences of Hanshin- Awaji earthquake, Miyake Island volcano eruption, Sarin attack by the Aum Cult of Terror, and the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 elevated citizen's attention to respirators.

Government standards are issued by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare for gas masks and particulate respirators for industrial uses, which are certified by Technology Institution of Industrial Safety. The surveillance of products in the market is also performed by the same Institution in contract with Government. Those for mining uses are certified by National Institute of Technology and Evaluation based on Japanese Industrial Standards (JIS). The respirators for Self Defense Forces are standardized separately and self-tested. The respirators for escape purposes from fire are standardized by the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, and approved by Fire Protection Equipment and Safety Center of Japan. However, the respirators for fire fighters are not standardized but controlled by local governments. For safety of sailors, SCBAs are certified by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. The Ship Equipment Inspection Society of Japan also performs products inspection at manufacturing site. Medical staffs of tuberculosis wards are guided to use N95 respirators in accordance to the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health standard. The Bacteria Filtration Efficiency test is performed by the Japan Synthetic Textile Inspection Institute Foundation voluntarily based on the U.S. Military standard. Fumigation workers are guided to use gas masks in compliance with the Government standards, but farmers are not controlled for respiratory protection. Japanese Industrial Standards (JIS) are issued for a variety of respirators but most of them are only voluntarily adopted by manufacturers. However, JIS system will be changed in the near future to be accompanied by a certification system operated by private sectors.