

# U.S. Department of Labor

Occupational Safety and Health Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20210



January 18, 1984

Honorable James T. Broyhill  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Broyhill:

Thank you for your letter of November 17, 1983, on behalf of your constituent, Mr. Paul Abernathy, regarding shaving beards to wear respiratory protection equipment.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has a standard on respiratory protection which employers are required to follow when their employees must wear respirators (29 CFR 1910.134). This standard states in part: "~~Respirators shall not be worn when conditions prevent a good face seal. Such conditions may be a growth of beard....~~"

(Correction 3/30/99)

[(g)(1) Facepiece seal protection.

(i) The employer shall not permit respirators with tight-fitting facepieces to be worn by employees who have:

(A) Facial hair that comes between the sealing surface of the facepiece and the face or that interferes with valve function; or

(B) Any condition that interferes with the face-to-facepiece seal or valve function.]

Mr. Abernathy's employer is apparently complying with this standard as required. It is not permissible to negotiate individual exemptions from such requirements by signing a release as suggested. There are certain types of respirators, however, which do not require a facepiece-to-face seal to function properly, for example, a supplied-air hood. Perhaps Mr. Abernathy can discuss with his employer whether or not such an alternative would be appropriate or feasible in his work situation. If not, however, and if Mr. Abernathy's job requires wearing a respirator which seals the facepiece to the face, no facial hair which interferes with that seal is permitted.

We hope this information will be helpful to you in responding to your constituent. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

R. Leonard Vance, Ph.D.  
Director  
Health Standards Programs