



## RESP-FIT® Beard Cover Technique Position Statement

RESP-FIT is aware of the recent adoption of a beard covering technique being used in fit testing tight fitting respirators, particularly in Healthcare. This technique, known as the Singh Thatta, <sup>1</sup> involves the use of an exercise resistance band wrapped around a wearers chin/beard and tied up on top of the head to create a smoother surface over the beard or facial hair, aiming for a better sealing surface area. Disposable balaclavas have also been used in this way to try and improve the tight fitting seal. All international standards, including AS/NZS 1715:2009, ISO 16975-3, OSHA 1910.134 and others, clearly state that there should be no facial hair on a wearers' face underneath a tight-fitting respirator sealing surface area. Facial hair prevents an adequate seal from being achieved, and the level of protection is neither reliable nor predictable.

**RESP-FIT does NOT recommend the use of this technique** for the following reasons:

- There is limited evidence in these published studies that provides assurance that a good seal to the face is achieved and maintained or that the seal and protection is predictable, reliable and that the wearer is therefore adequately protected;
- The technique itself contravenes (ISO 16975 3:2017 Respiratory protective devices - Selection, use and maintenance), wherein Part 3: Fit-testing procedures' it states: "6.3.2 Foreign material - A fit test shall not be conducted if there is any foreign material or substance between the sealing surface of the respiratory interface and the face or neck";
- The criteria for evaluating fit test methods given in ISO 16975-3 Annex C7 and OSHA 1910.134 references American National Standards Institute ANSI Z88 on Fit Testing. RESP-FIT is not aware of any evidence that this new fit testing method was evaluated against the ANSI Z88 criteria;
- It is contrary to respirator manufacturers user instructions relating to the integrity of the fit. This, in turn, may invalidate any approvals (NIOSH, CE, AS/NZS 1716) for the respirator used with; and

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<sup>1</sup> Singh R, Safri HS, Singh S, Ubhi BS, Singh G, Alg GS, Randhawa G, Gill S. Under-mask beard cover (Singh Thatta technique) for donning respirator masks in COVID-19 patient care. J Hosp Infect. 2020 Dec;106(4):782-785. doi: 10.1016/j.jhin.2020.09.034. Epub 2020 Oct 3



- There are alternative forms of RPE, such as a loose fitting headtop connected to a PAPR that do not rely on a tight fit to the face. These are available in the market for those with facial hair or beards.

The National Institute of Safety & Health (NIOSH) and the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) UK also do not recommend adopting this practice.

RESP-FIT is not in principle opposed to considering any proposal that may provide an effective working solution; however, the current scientific evidence does not support that this method can deliver the required level of assurance.

For the reasons given above, the use of the beard covering technique with tight fitting respirators would not demonstrate duty of care as required by WHS/OHS regulations, in that exposure to a substance hazardous to health will not have been adequately controlled.

RESP-FIT does recognise and sympathise with the deep religious and cultural significances involved. However, RESP-FITs' concern is based on the fact that respiratory protective equipment (RPE) needs to be adequate and suitable to protect the wearer from the inhalation of substances hazardous to health (including SARS-CoV-2).

If you have any questions, please get in touch with RESP-FIT via email at [respfit@aioh.org.au](mailto:respfit@aioh.org.au)

Prepared by the RESP-FIT Board December 2021:

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