

How to Pick the Right SCBA

Guideline for Industrial Safety Professionals



So you're in charge of finding the right self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) to protect the health and safety of your workers.

So you're in charge of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), which are designed to protect the health and safety of your workers.

If you're like most safety and health managers, you'll likely find plenty of SCBA options, most of which carry these claims: "safe," "reliable," "comfortable," "user-friendly," and "NIOSH-approved."

While these claims are important (NIOSH-approved is imperative), picking the right SCBA is a bit more complicated.

How, then, can you know which SCBA is ideal for your unique environment and your workers' needs?

- **You can go for the lowest price**, but what about the real cost of ownership, including maintenance and product lifespan?
- **You can compare user features**, but what about other factors, such as environmental demands and operating time?
- **You can purchase from any manufacturer or distributor**, but what about training, integration with other equipment, and retrofitting?

Selecting the right SCBA for the job, environment, and worker can save you time and money.

To find the right SCBA to meet your safety needs, and also follow Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and American National Standards Institute (ANSI) guidelines, you need to consider some critical factors beyond what you'll find in a vendor's marketing materials or fine print.

So how can you pick the right SCBA?

Start with these five questions. Your answers to questions about contaminant type, concentration, hazard ratio, and workplace conditions can assist you in finding the right SCBA for your workplace and workers — and provide you with a starting point for comparing SCBAs.

1. What are the respiratory hazards your workers are facing?
2. How much exposure to these hazards are your workers facing?
3. What are the physical and chemical properties of the hazards?
4. What other safety hazards might be present?
5. What personal demands and environmental stressors also need to be factored in?

Key Considerations: It's Not Black or White...It's Gray

When it comes to SCBA requirements, there are a lot of variables.

Your challenge is to understand your organization's unique application, demands, user needs, budget, and maintenance requirements, in order to pick the best SCBA for the job and the worker.

Because there is no one-size-fits-all SCBA, here are some key factors to consider when choosing an SCBA:

- **Cleaning and Maintenance:** What kind of cleaning, decontamination, and maintenance is required, and how often?
- **Communications:** Do you require radio comms, voice amplification, or both?
- **Facemask Fit:** Have you factored in the extra cost of individual user fit testing?
- **Features & Benefits:** What are the basic and advanced needs of your wearers?
 - **Cleaning:** Is the SCBA easy to clean? Do its soft goods have chemical-resistant properties?
 - **Comfort & Fit:** Is the SCBA assembly designed to reduce stress and fatigue? Is it lightweight? Are there available options to improve comfort, such as an ergonomic lumbar pad?
 - **Cylinder:** Does the SCBA accommodate multiple cylinder options, including low- and high-pressure, as well as 30-, 45-, and 60-minute duration cylinders? Are the cylinders easy and effortless to change out?
 - **Compatibility:** Does it offer compatibility for use of the same cylinder across multiple SCBA platforms across your existing fleet? Can you easily integrate it with other NFPA products you might have?
 - **Easy Maintenance:** Does the SCBA have replaceable parts and removable soft goods for easy maintenance without special tools?
 - **Facepiece:** Is it lightweight and compact? Does it provide low breathing resistance on air and off? Is there an adapter available that can convert the facepiece for use in air purifying applications?
 - **Harness Assembly:** Is the assembly built for comfort, yet durable enough to pull workers to safety if necessary?
 - **Regulators:** Is there an integrated shut-off valve to prevent air loss when disconnecting from the cylinder?
 - **Visibility:** Does the SCBA facepiece offer a wide field of view for improved visibility?
- **Repairs:** Do you need to send the SCBA out for repair or can it be repaired on site?
- **ROI:** Do you know the lifetime costs, including vendor maintenance plans and parts replacement?
- **Training:** Where is training conducted, who receives training, and is the training included in the price of equipment?

Making the Decision

Let MSA work with you to help you select the SCBA that's suitable for the job and the worker. Contact us at **1-800-672-2222** or info.us@msasafety.com for help choosing your SCBA or to learn more.

MSA – The Safety Company

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