

Securing an SCBA after Adverse Conditions, Serious Injury, or Line-of-Duty Death

Firefighters rely on self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) for protection when working in environments that are immediately dangerous to life or health (IDLH).

Adverse conditions include any issues that weaken SCBA protection, such as reduced performance, failures, or near-failures. These can lead to serious injury or line-of-duty death (LODD).

When firefighters experience issues while using SCBA, it is critical to investigate possible causes.

Fire departments can develop protocols to secure potentially failed SCBA in their incident condition. This enables fire departments or other entities to inspect functionality, secure critical data, and establish a chain of custody as part of an investigation.



Photo by NIOSH

NFPA Requirements

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1850 requires fire departments to secure an SCBA following adverse conditions. This includes removing the SCBA with cylinder and facepiece from service, restricting access, and documenting chain of custody. Securing an SCBA helps to identify possible causes contributing to a serious injury or LODD. Preserving equipment logs and documentation as outlined in NFPA 1400 assists with understanding use and maintenance before the adverse condition.

Who Conducts Investigations

Any of the following groups may conduct an SCBA investigation:

- Fire department, per NFPA 1550
- Law enforcement agency
- SCBA manufacturer
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- Other workplace safety agency

NIOSH is the approval body for respiratory protective devices under 42 C.F.R. Part 84 and may evaluate SCBA issues. These investigations may result in actions to ensure respirators offer the level of protection that manufacturers claim. For more information, see [Notifying NIOSH of SCBA Failure, Adverse Conditions, or Reduce Performance.](#)



**U.S. Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention**
National Institute for
Occupational Safety and Health



Photo by NIOSH

Steps to Secure an SCBA

1. Immediately assign personnel to take custody of the SCBA with cylinder and facepiece.
2. Document conditions, such as air remaining in cylinder, position of cylinder valve (open, closed, $\frac{1}{2}$ open), personal alert safety system device status, buddy breathing system use, and emergency bypass status (on or off).
3. Photograph all SCBA components.
4. Close cylinder valve, bleed down air in system, and turn SCBA off.
5. Place all SCBA components in a bag and secure the opening.
6. Place the bagged SCBA in a secure location, such as a locked storage cabinet or room.
7. Document chain of custody information, including SCBA details, incident number, personnel handling the SCBA, and any contamination.

For more on securing an SCBA, see [F2013-16](#) (pages 69, 99, 100).

Visit [Personal Protective Equipment](#) to view reports and other firefighting resources.

Precautions to Keep in Mind

SCBA used in an IDLH environment may be contaminated. Take the following precautions when handling and storing SCBA to prevent unintentionally transferring contaminants:

- Allow the SCBA to off-gas, cool, and dry in an open and secure environment before sealing it in a bag.
- Handle the SCBA with personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, safety glasses, and respiratory protection.
- Store the SCBA in a secure location that does not expose firefighters to contaminants.

It is important to remove an SCBA from the storage bag with caution using PPE in an open-air environment.