

Safety Meeting Topic

Voluntary Use of Respirators

February, 2008

Occupational health and safety regulations have several requirements that must be met for employees to safely use respirators. When respiratory protection is mandated based on potential exposures to air contaminants, a written program must be developed and implemented that addresses the regulatory requirements including; medical surveillance; training; fit testing; and maintenance and care of respirators. Procedures specific to each circumstance or operations requiring respirator use must also be developed. These requirements are being met by ASU through its Respiratory Protection Program as implemented by Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S). The program is available at <http://www.asu.edu/uagc/EHS/riskforms/ASU%20Respiratory%20Protection%20Plan.pdf>.

If your organization is requiring the use of respirators including dust masks and you are not currently working with EH&S, please contact our office immediately at 480-965-1823 or at EHS@asu.edu.

There are circumstances where employees may voluntarily use respirators in the course of their work that is exempt from most of the regulatory requirements. This is referred to as voluntary use and typically this is found when employees want to wear filtering face-piece respirators, often referred to as dust masks, for personal comfort when working in areas where nuisance dust is present. Filtering face-piece respirators are often referred to as N-95 respirators, disposable respirators or even paper masks. Loose fitting surgical masks are not considered a respirator. This is of course an oversimplification as there are a great variety of respirators available for use. For the voluntary use of filtering face piece respirators, regulations on require that the following information from the Occupational Safety & Health Administration be shared with employees.

(Mandatory) Information for Employees Using Respirators When not Required Under Standard 1910.134 Appendix D

Standard Number: 1910.134 App D

Standard Title: (Mandatory) Information for Employees Using Respirators When not Required Under Standard.

SubPart Number: I

SubPart Title: Personal Protective Equipment

Respirators are an effective method of protection against designated hazards when properly selected and worn. Respirator use is encouraged, even when exposures are below the exposure limit, to provide an additional level of comfort and protection for workers. However, if a respirator is used improperly or not kept clean, the respirator itself can become a hazard to the worker. Sometimes, workers may wear respirators to avoid exposures to hazards, even if the amount of hazardous substance does not exceed the limits set by OSHA standards. If your employer provides respirators for your voluntary use, or if you provide your own respirator, you need to take certain precautions to be sure that the respirator itself does not present a hazard.

You should do the following:

1. Read and heed all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirators limitations.

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2. Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern. NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, certifies respirators. A label or statement of certification should appear on the respirator or respirator packaging. It will tell you what the respirator is designed for and how much it will protect you.

3. Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors, or very small solid particles of fumes or smoke.

4. Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.

[63 FR 1152, Jan. 8, 1998; 63 FR 20098, April 23, 1998]

However, Employees choosing to wear a half face piece air purifying respirator other than a dust mask or N-95 filtering face-piece respirator must comply with the procedures for medical evaluation, respirator use, and cleaning, maintenance and storage. Please contact the EH&S office if you use a respirator other than a filtering face piece respirator voluntarily.

For more information, please review the Respiratory Protection fact sheet at <http://www.asu.edu/uagc/EHS/respprotection.htm>.



Example of N-95 Filtering Face-piece Respirator – this example is an N-95



Example of typical Half Mask Respirator – this example is a North 7700 frequently used at ASU