

Respirator voluntary use

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:

- Fit testing.
- Maintenance and care of respirators.
- Medical surveillance.
- Training.

Procedures specific to each circumstance or operations requiring respirator use must also be developed. ASU meets these requirements through our [Respiratory Protection Program](#) implemented by Environmental Health and Safety, or EHS, and available through the EHS website.

Individuals who are mandated to wear a respirator must always wear the same size and model of respirator they were fit tested for during their respirator fit test. Individuals that use a different size or model respirator than what they were fit tested are not compliant with the ASU respirator protection program.

If your organization requires the use of respirators including dust masks and you are not currently participating in the ASU Respiratory Protection Program, please contact EHS immediately at 480-965-1823 or asuehs@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 paper dust 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 voluntary use of filtering face piece respirators, Occupational Safety and Health Administration requires Appendix D Sec. 1910.134 be shared with employees.

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 ASU EHS at 480-965-1823, if you voluntarily use a respirator other than a filtering face piece respirator.

The respirators used for mandatory or voluntary use shall be cleaned and disinfected at the following intervals:

- Respirators issued for the exclusive use of an employee shall be cleaned and disinfected as often as necessary to be maintained in a sanitary condition
- Respirators issued to more than one employee shall be cleaned and disinfected before being worn by different individuals

The employer shall ensure that respirators are stored as follows:

- All respirators shall be stored to protect them from damage, contamination, dust, sunlight, extreme temperatures, excessive moisture, and damaging chemicals, and they shall be packed or stored to prevent deformation of the face piece and exhalation valve.

Appendix D to Sec. 1910.134 - Mandatory

Information for employees using respirators when not required under the standard

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.
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.



Example of N-95 filtering face piece respirator



Example of typical half mask respirator