

VOLUNTARY USE OF FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATORS

1. FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATORS AND OSHA REQUIREMENTS

- Filtering Facepiece Respirators (often called “N95s” or dust masks) are considered true respirators according to OSHA.** N95 refers to the NIOSH certification of the filter media that comprises the facepiece. N means that it is not oil resistant and 95 refers to it being 95% effective at filtering particles at the 0.3 micron level. N95 is the most common type of filtering facepiece respirator. Other NIOSH-certified filtering facepiece respirators include R95, P95, N100 and P100.
- Employees may wear a respirator voluntarily in the workplace provided that:** 1. its use is for employee comfort purposes only; 2. no hazard exists that requires the use of a respirator; 3. its use does not produce an additional hazard; and 3. the respirator for voluntary use is the filtering facepiece respirator. Use of any other type of respirator, for example, a ½ face elastomeric respirator with cartridges, requires full compliance with the University of Connecticut’s Respirator Program.
- Some employees are required to wear a filtering facepiece respirator** (to protect against a respiratory hazard or as required by the employer). When respirator use is required, employees must be enrolled in the University’s Respirator Program, which includes a medical evaluation, respirator training and fit testing. All respirators, including N95s, can restrict breathing and are not recommended for those with certain medical conditions. If you have questions on use of N95s, contact ehs@uconn.edu for direction.
- OSHA requires that all employees voluntarily wearing filtering facepiece respirators receive basic information** on respirators as provided in Appendix D of their Respirator Standard, 1910.134 (which is found at the end of this document). – **Review Appendix D**
- Filtering facepiece respirators like N95s can be used as effective means of source control**, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, in place of surgical/procedure-style masks, KN95s and cloth masks. In the workplace, however, this is considered voluntary use of a respirator and training requirements still apply. Concerns about voluntary use with pre-existing medical conditions should be discussed with your healthcare provider.

2. HOW TO USE AND WEAR A FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATOR

- Inspect respirators prior to use**, including new units out of the box. Check for rips and tears. Make sure straps are securely attached, nose piece is attached properly, and that no obvious defects exist.
 - Proper use of the respirator is important.** Without it, the respirator is ineffective against the workplace contaminants. Follow manufacturers’ instructions for use.
 - Filtering Facepiece respirators are not designed to be one-size-fits-all.** When use is required, respirator fit testing is necessary to ensure that the individual is using the appropriate model and/or size to achieve an adequate seal.
 - Beards and other facial hair negate the effectiveness of the respirator** because they prevent an adequate seal between the respirator and the face. Skin afflictions, such as dermatitis, or scars, could affect the ability to produce a seal.
 - User seal checks provide an assurance that a seal with the face is achieved** when the mask is applied at that time. User seal checks should be done every time the mask is put on and every time it is re-adjusted on the face. Review the manufacturers’ instructions for conducting user seal checks. User seal checks are NOT a replacement for fit testing and cannot confirm that the mask is providing respiratory protection.
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3. LIMITATIONS OF PPE

- Filtering facepiece respirators are only useful for protection against particulates.** They are not to be used in oxygen-deficient atmospheres or atmospheres that contain hazards that are immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH). Odors will still be noted when using the respirator because it does not filter out gases or vapors. The respirator will not provide adequate protection to the user if a good seal with the face is not achieved.

4. CARE, MAINTENANCE, USEFUL LIFE AND DISPOSAL OF PPE

- Filtering Facepiece Respirators are considered disposable PPE.** They cannot be cleaned, especially when they become wet or soiled. They cannot be shared with other employees.
- For voluntary use as source control (in place of procedure masks, cloth masks, etc), masks can be stored in a breathable brown bag for several days and reused,** unless they become visibly soiled or damaged. For further information, see CDC's Your Guide to Masks (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>)
- New respirators should be stored properly,** in a clean, dry location, protected from sunlight, chemicals, water, and physical damage.
- Respirators must comply with the University's Respirator Program** which can be found at <https://media.ehs.uconn.edu/Occupational/PPE/RespiratorProgram.pdf>.

OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard, 29CFR1910.134

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.