

RESPIRATORY PROTECTION – VOLUNTARY USE OF RESPIRATORY PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

Introduction

Employees who voluntarily use respirators (use not required to protect their health, generally because exposures are well below established occupational limits) must be provided with certain information. This can be accomplished by providing the employee with a copy of this SOP or 29 CFR 1910.134 Appendix D. This information must be provided to any employee who voluntarily elects to use a respirator whether the respirator is provided by the supervisor/employer or by the employee at his/her own expense.

Respirators provide effective protection when properly selected and worn. However, if a respirator is used improperly, or not kept clean, the respirator itself can become a hazard to the worker. The following general guidelines will assist the user in proper respirator use.

- Contact EHS prior to working in atmospheres that may contain respiratory hazards. EHS will evaluate the types and quantities of contaminants to determine if respirator use is required (contaminants are at or near occupational exposure limits) or voluntary. If occupational exposure limits may be exceeded without use of a respirator, use is no longer considered voluntary and all requirements of UNL's Respiratory Protection Program apply (i.e., training, fit-testing, record-keeping, etc.).
- Voluntary use of a respirator is subject to medical qualification, except voluntary use of a filtering facepiece (dust mask or disposable paper type dust respirator).
- Use only a respirator (and associated filters and/or cartridges) certified to protect against the contaminant(s) of concern. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is the certifying body for respirators. A label or statement of certification will appear on the respirator or respirator packaging. The label will state what contaminants the respirator is designed for and the level of protection that it will provide. Do not wear a respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants or levels that it is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect against gases or vapors.



- Read and follow the manufacturer’s instructions for use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirator’s limitations.
- Employees should keep track of their assigned respirator so that another person does not use it. However, use caution in marking respirators with indelible ink or like substances because they can degrade or otherwise adversely affect the performance of the respirator.

This SOP supplements the UNL Respiratory Protection Program. Refer to the full program document for more information.

See also 3 videos provided by the US Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration:

1. [The Difference Between Respirators and Surgical Masks](#)
2. [Respirator Safety, Donning \(Putting on\) and Doffing \(Taking off\) and User Seal Checks](#)
3. [Voluntary Use Respirators](#)