

# Voluntary Use of N-95 Respirators

## Employee Safety Information

**Instructions: Review the following information, including Appendix D on the reverse, with the employee, have employee initial each box, sign the form (both employee and reviewer) and maintain a readily retrievable copy of the signed form.**

### 1. FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATORS AND OSHA REQUIREMENTS

OSHA considers NIOSH-certified filtering facepiece respirators, such as N-95 (also called dust masks) as true respirators. N-95 is the most common type of filtering facepiece respirator available for use at Columbia University. The letter **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. Other NIOSH-certified filtering facepiece respirators include R-95, P-95, N-100 and P-100.

OSHA requires that employees voluntarily wearing filtering facepiece respirators receive basic information on respirators as provided in Appendix D of OSHA Respirator Standard, 1910.134.

Voluntary use of a respirator is defined as use for employee comfort purposes only. This means that no actual hazard exists that requires use of a respirator and the use of the respirator does not produce any additional hazard to the user. At Columbia University, the only acceptable respirator for voluntary use is the filtering facepiece respirator. Use of any other types of respirator, for example, a half-face or full-face respirator with cartridges, requires full compliance with the University's Respiratory Protection Program.

If an employee is required to wear a filtering facepiece respirator to protect against a respiratory hazard, as determined by EH&S, full compliance with the University's Respiratory Protection Program is required, which includes a medical evaluation by a licensed health care professional, respirator training and respirator fit testing.

### 2. HOW TO USE AND WEAR A FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATOR

Inspect the respirator prior to use, including brand new respirators. 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. If not used properly, the respirator may be ineffective against airborne contaminants. Always follow manufacturers' instructions for use. – **Review manufacturer's instructions with the employee and have employee demonstrate proper use.**

[ ] Beards and other facial hair prevent an adequate seal between the respirator and the face, rendering the respirator ineffective. Skin afflictions, such as dermatitis, or scars, could affect the ability to produce a good seal.

[ ] A “seal check” should be performed by the user every time the mask is put on and every time it is re-adjusted on the face. A user seal check confirms that an adequate seal with the face is achieved when the mask is applied – **Review manufacturers’ instructions for conducting user seal checks with employee.**

### 3. *LIMITATIONS OF PPE*

[ ] Filtering facepiece respirators are only useful for protection against particulates (e.g., dust), NOT gases or vapors. Odors will still be noted when using the respirator. Respirators are not to be used in oxygen-deficient atmospheres or atmospheres that contain hazards that are Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH).

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

[ ] Filtering facepiece respirators are considered disposable PPE and can be disposed of in regular trash after use, unless otherwise directed. They cannot be cleaned, especially when they become wet or soiled. They must not be shared with other employees.

[ ] Respirators should be stored in a clean, dry location, protected from sunlight, chemicals, water, and physical damage.

## **Appendix D to OSHA Standard Section 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.

**Certification:** I have reviewed this memo and take full responsibility to follow the directions. If there is any change in my work conditions or health I will immediately notify my supervisor or EH&S.

Employee's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dept.: \_\_\_\_\_ UNI: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Reviewer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dept.: \_\_\_\_\_ UNI: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Reviewer can be the employee's supervisor, departmental administrator, safety representative or other individual familiar with respirator use and able to verify the user's comprehension of the manufacturer's instructions, the benefits and limitations of a voluntary use respirator and ability to properly use a respirator.**