

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Personal Protective Equipment- Voluntary Use of Dust Masks

[Reference 1910.134 / 1926.103]

Workers required to wear respirators as part of their jobs must participate in a full-blown respiratory protection program. And that can require some extensive measures be taken, such as medical examinations and respirator fit-testing.

However, an employee wishing to wear a paper dust mask or similar filtering-face piece respirator for protection against nuisance levels of dust may choose to do so without having to go through the rigors of the entire program. Instead, OSHA only requires their employer provide them with the information contained in Appendix D of the OSHA standard for respiratory protection.

The company has a copy of this appendix (*attached to this toolbox talk*) available for you to view (*explain where it is posted, or pass a copy to each trainee*). Here is an overview of the information contained in that appendix:

- **Read and heed all instructions** provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirators limitations.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Keep track of your respirator** so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.

Our company allows workers to wear paper dust masks voluntarily, but we do insist that you adhere to the recommendations contained in Appendix D of the OSHA respiratory protection standard.

Any question or comment about voluntary use of a paper dust mask or similar filtering face piece respirator on the job? Please be sure to sign-in on the training certification form.

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.

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

