

Fact Sheet

Voluntary use of N-95 respirators.

Respirators are a method of protecting you from identified atmospheric contaminants. You may wear a respirator even if your exposure is below the exposure limit, to provide an additional level of comfort, or to avoid exposure to a contaminant. However, if a respirator is used improperly or is not kept clean, it may become a hazard itself. If you wear a respirator on a voluntary basis, you still need to take certain precautions to ensure it is used safely.

Take these actions before you use a respirator.

- ✓ Choose a certified respirator. Respirators do not protect against all hazards. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (NIOSH) certifies respirators. A label or statement of certification appears on the respirator or on the respirator packaging.



The label names contaminants that the respirator is designed to remove. It will also tell you how much contamination the respirator can remove. For example, an N-95 dust mask filters 95% of particles at .3 microns in an oil-mist free environment.

- ✓ Read and follow instructions provided by the manufacturer. The manufacturer provides information about respirator use, maintenance, cleaning, and storage. Pay

attention to special warnings. A dirty respirator can concentrate a hazard.

- ✓ Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing a contaminant not listed on the label. For example, a dust mask will not protect you against a gas, vapor, fume or smoke. They are not suitable for high hazard contaminants like asbestos.
- ✓ Keep track of your respirator. Do not use someone else's respirator.
- ✓ Stop using a respirator if it makes you feel bad (tired or sick). Talk to your doctor and let your supervisor know what has happened.
- ✓ Respirators place a burden on your cardiovascular system. Before you use a respirator, you must complete the online medical questionnaire.
- ✓ To access training, request a medical evaluation or fit-testing go to:
- ✓ <https://ohs.umn.edu/respiratory-protection-program>

University Health and safety (UHS) is available for hazard analysis, respirator selection and fit testing and training. Call (612) 626-6002 for advice about products or for a workplace hazard assessment.