

# **Stanford University – Respiratory Protection Program**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***General Questions***

1. When is the use of respirators required?
2. Who do I contact if I think I need a respirator?
3. What is required in a respirator program and who is in charge?
4. What if I want to wear a respirator even though it is not required?

### ***Medical Requirements***

5. Do I need medical clearance prior to wearing a respirator?
6. Do I have to complete a Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire?

### ***Training***

7. Is training required before a respirator is used?

### ***Respirator Selection and Fitting***

8. Can any respirator be used?
9. Can I wear a single strap dust mask?
10. What is an N95 respirator?
11. How is the proper respirator size determined?
12. Can employees check the fit of their own respirator?
13. When is respirator fit testing required?
14. What can be done if an employee has a very small face and has trouble being fit tested for a respirator?
15. What can be done if employees find it difficult to talk with co-workers when wearing a respirator?
16. If employees have a beard or moustache, is their respirator still effective?
17. Can employees wear glasses while wearing a respirator?

### ***Respirator Maintenance and Storage***

18. Can a respirator be used by more than one person? How often should it be cleaned and disinfected?
19. How long can a particulate respirator be used before it must be replaced?
20. What is the proper way to store a respirator that is used routinely?
21. Are there any additional requirements for the storage of emergency respirators?

# Stanford University – Respiratory Protection Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

### General Questions

**1. *When is the use of respirators required?***

California-OSHA's respirator standard, Title 8 CCR 5144, requires the use of respirators to protect employees from breathing contaminated and/or oxygen-deficient air when effective engineering controls are not feasible, or while they are being instituted. Appropriate respirators must be used when controls are not sufficient to reduce respiratory hazards to a level below established exposure limits. Several other CAL-OSHA regulations also require the use of respirators.

---

**2. *Who do I contact if I think I need a respirator?***

Tell your supervisor your concerns and your supervisor should contact Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) at 723-0448 or [http://www.stanford.edu/dept/EHS/prod/aboutus/new\\_concern.html](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/EHS/prod/aboutus/new_concern.html) to evaluate the work process to determine if respirators are required.

---

**3. *What is required in a respirator program and who is in charge?***

The Program Administrator for the respirator program is Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S). The program establishes and implements a written respiratory protection program with worksite-specific procedures and elements for required respirator use. The provisions of the program include procedures for selection, medical evaluation, fit testing, training, use and care of respirators.

---

**4. *What if I want to wear a respirator even though it is not required?***

If you want to wear a dust mask (filtering facepiece), two requirements must be met:

- You must complete the Voluntary Respirator Use Agreement.
- EH&S determines that the respirator itself does not create a hazard.

If you want to wear any other kind of respirator, the above requirements must be met and:

- You must be medically cleared by our Occupational Health Provider (or Vaden Health Center if you are a student).
  - The respirator must be properly cleaned, stored and maintained.
- 

## **Medical Requirements**

### **5. *Do I need medical clearance prior to wearing a respirator?***

Yes. Employees and students must be medically cleared by our Occupational Health Provider (or Vaden Health Center if the user is a student). The Occupational Health Provider must perform a medical evaluation to determine the user's ability to use a respirator before the user is fit tested or required to use the respirator in the workplace. Exception: When voluntarily using a dust mask (filtering facepiece) a medical clearance is not required.

---

### **6. *Do I have to complete a Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire?***

Yes. You must complete this questionnaire as part of the medical evaluation. A physician or other licensed health care professional must perform the medical evaluation using the medical questionnaire contained in Appendix D of the Stanford Respiratory Protection Program or an initial medical examination that obtains the same information. Users do not need to be examined by a doctor unless follow-up examinations are required. This questionnaire is also available at our Occupational Health Provider.

---

## **Training**

### **7. *Is training required before a respirator is used?***

Yes, training must be provided to employees who are required to use respirators. Contact EH&S at 723-0448 to schedule training.

---

## Respirator Selection and Fitting

### 8. *Can any respirator be used?*

No, respirators shall be selected on the basis of hazards to which the worker is exposed (i.e., particulates, vapors, infectious agents, oxygen-deficiency, or combination). Also, CAL-OSHA requires the use of respirators certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). EH&S will advise on the type of respirator to be used.

---

### 9. *Can I wear a single strap dust mask?*

Single strap dust masks are not NIOSH certified and should not be used at Stanford.

---

### 10. *What is an N95 respirator?*

An N95 respirator is an air-purifying respirator that was tested for contaminants consisting of particles with mass median aerodynamic diameters of at least 2 micrometers with a 95% minimum efficiency in a non-oil aerosol atmosphere.

---

### 11. *How is the proper respirator size determined?*

Proper respirator size is determined through a fit test. Employees using negative or positive pressure tight-fitting facepiece respirators must pass an appropriate fit test using the procedures detailed in Appendix B of the Stanford Respirator Protection Program. This fit testing is performed by EH&S.



Qualitative Fit Test Chamber



Quantitative Fit Testing Equipment

Copyright 2002 TSI Incorporated, Used with permission

---

**12. Can employees check the fit of their own respirator?**

Yes, employees using tight-fitting facepiece respirators are required to perform a *user seal check* each time they put on the respirator. They must use the procedures in Appendix B-1 of T8 CCR5144 (see below) or equally effective manufacturer's procedures. Note that a *fit test* is a method used to select the right size respirator for the user. A *user seal check* is a method to verify that the user has correctly put on the respirator and adjusted it to fit properly, as illustrated below.



**User Seal Check: worker covering inlet and inhaling  
(negative pressure check)**

A. *Positive pressure check.* Close off the exhalation valve and exhale gently into the facepiece. The face fit is considered satisfactory if a slight positive pressure can be built up inside the facepiece without any evidence of outward leakage of air at the seal. For most respirators this method of leak testing requires the wearer to first remove the exhalation valve cover before closing off the exhalation valve and then carefully replacing it after the test.

B. *Negative pressure check.* Close off the inlet opening of the canister or cartridge(s) by covering with the palm of the hand(s) or by replacing the filter seal(s), inhale gently so that the facepiece collapses slightly, and hold the breath for ten seconds. The design of the inlet opening of some cartridges cannot be effectively covered with the palm of the hand. The test can be performed by covering the inlet opening of the cartridge with a thin latex or nitrile glove. If the facepiece remains in its slightly collapsed condition and no inward leakage of air is detected, the tightness of the respirator is considered satisfactory.

---

**13. When is respirator fit testing required?**

Fit testing of all negative or positive pressure tight-fitting facepiece respirators is required prior to initial use, whenever a different respirator facepiece is used, and at least annually thereafter. An additional fit test is required whenever there are changes in the user's physical condition that could affect respirator fit (e.g., facial scarring, dental changes, cosmetic surgery, or an obvious change in body weight). The employee must be fit tested with the same make, model, style, and size of respirator that will be used. Exception: Voluntary use of respirators.

---

**14. *What can be done if an employee has a very small face and has trouble being fit tested for a respirator?***

Manufacturers make several different sizes. Respirators may also vary in size from manufacturer to manufacturer. Users may be able to get a better fit by trying a respirator made by another manufacturer. In some cases, the use of powered air-purifying respirators may be appropriate. EH&S will help employees find a suitable respirator.

---

**15. *What can be done if employees find it difficult to talk with co-workers when wearing a respirator?***

Some respirators may interfere with speech more than others. Devices that enhance speech communication are available. Ask EH&S if there are alternatives.

---

**16. *If employees have a beard or moustache, is their respirator still effective?***

Tight-fitting facepiece respirators must not be worn by employees who have facial hair that comes between the sealing surface of the facepiece and the face or that interferes with valve function. Respirators that do not rely on a tight face seal, such as hoods or helmets, may be used by bearded individuals.

---

**17. *Can employees wear glasses while wearing a respirator?***

Yes, but if an employee wears corrective glasses or goggles or other personal protective equipment, the employer must ensure that such equipment is worn in a manner that does not interfere with the seal of the facepiece to the face of the user. Kits are available from all respirator manufacturers that allow the mounting of prescription lenses inside the respirator.

Contact lenses can be worn with any type of respirator, but their use is not recommended in dusty atmospheres while wearing a half-mask facepiece.

---

## **Respirator Maintenance and Storage**

**18. *Can a respirator be used by more than one person? How often should it be cleaned and disinfected?***

Disposable respirators cannot be disinfected, and are therefore assigned to only one person. Disposable respirators must be discarded if they are soiled, physically damaged,

or reach the end of their service life. Replaceable filter respirators may be shared, but must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each use before being worn by a different person, using the procedures in [Appendix B-2 of T8 CCR5144](#), or equally effective manufacturer's procedures.

---

**19.      *How long can a particulate respirator be used before it must be replaced?***

Respirators with replaceable filters are reusable, and a respirator classified as disposable may be reused by the same worker as long as it functions properly. All filters must be replaced whenever they are damaged, soiled, or causing noticeably increased breathing resistance (e.g., causing discomfort to the user). Before each use, the outside of the filter material should be inspected. If the filter material is physically damaged or soiled, the filter should be changed (in the case of respirators with replaceable filters) or the respirator discarded (in the case of disposable respirators).

Supervisors must develop standard operating procedures for storing, reusing, and disposing of respirators that have been designated as disposable and for disposing of replaceable filter elements.

---

**20.      *What is the proper way to store a respirator that is used routinely?***

Respirators must be stored to protect them from damage, contamination, dust, sunlight, extreme temperatures, excessive moisture, and damaging chemicals. They must also be packed or stored to prevent deformation of the facepiece and exhalation valve. A good method is to place them in individual storage bins. Keep in mind that respirator facepieces will become distorted and the straps will lose their elasticity if hung on a peg for a long time. Check for these problems before each use.

Storing the respirator in a plastic sealable bag after use is not considered a good practice. The respirator may be damp after use and sealing prevents drying and encourages microbial growth. If plastic bags are used, respirators must be allowed to dry before storage.

---

**21.      *Are there any additional requirements for the storage of emergency respirators?***

Yes, emergency respirators must be kept accessible to the work area and stored in compartments or in covers that are clearly marked as containing emergency respirators, and stored in accordance with any applicable manufacturer instructions.