

# VOLUNTARY RESPIRATOR USE

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 by NIOSH for use to protect against the contaminant of concern.** 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.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF MY RESPIRATOR FITS WELL?

While a **user seal check is not a substitute for qualitative or quantitative fit-testing**, data suggests that it *can* be helpful in achieving a better quality fit. Here's what you should do:



1. Put on the respirator according to the manufacturer instructions (position straps correctly, pinch the nosepiece to fit the curve of your nose, etc.).
2. Be sure you can't feel any air escaping around the edges of the mask.
3. **Positive Pressure Check:** Place your hands over the facepiece, covering as much surface area as possible. Exhale gently. You should feel a slight build-up of pressure for a successful positive pressure check.
4. **Negative Pressure Check:** Place your hands over the facepiece, covering as much surface area as possible. Inhale. You should feel a slight decrease in pressure for a successful negative pressure check.
5. Re-adjust the facepiece until both the positive and negative pressure check is successful.

1. OSHA [1998]. Respiratory Protection. 29 CFR 1910.134

2. NIOSH [2018]. Filtering Out Confusion: Frequently asked questions about respiratory protection. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2018-130