

Respiratory Protection: Voluntary Use of Respirators

5-Minute Talk

Overview

OSHA refers to disposable paper respirators, or dust masks, as “filtering facepieces.” At 29 CFR 1910.134, OSHA defines these as “negative pressure particulate respirator with a filter that is an integral part of the facepiece or with the entire facepiece composed of the filter medium.” We will just call them dust masks.

In many cases, dust mask use is not required by the working conditions, but employees wish to voluntarily wear them. Under this scenario, the employer has specific training requirements which must be followed.

Provide Information

When employees use dust masks on a voluntary basis, the employer must make sure that the use of the respirator itself does not create a hazard. That is, to ensure that the use of dust masks does not in itself pose a hazard, or that their use does not interfere with the employee’s ability to work safely.

Prior to using voluntary-use dust masks, each employee must be provided with basic information on the proper use of respirators. The information may be transmitted either in written form or verbally.

When employees use dust masks on a voluntary basis, they need to understand how to use and care for them properly to provide the best protection.

Employer Responsibilities

Employers who allow their employees to wear respirators on a voluntary basis when not required by OSHA or the employer must implement limited provisions of a respiratory protection program.

With voluntary-use of dust masks in the workplace, OSHA does not require:

- Medical evaluations prior to use.
- A fit test.
- Users to remove beards to provide for a best fit.



However, the employer must make sure that employees are caring for and using them properly. You must also ensure that they do not wear their dust masks into atmospheres containing contaminants which the respirator is not designed to protect against.

When a filtering facepiece respirator is all that is used, the employee must be provided a copy of Appendix D, which is reproduced in the handout for this topic. For all other voluntary users, an additional written respirator program that covers medical fitness and proper maintenance procedures must be implemented.

Training Tips

Review 1910.134 and APPENDIX D to 1910.134. Also review the employee handout. Train your employees to:

- Read and follow manufacturer instructions on use, maintenance, cleaning, and care.
- Use the respirator for what the manufacturer designed it for and look for proper certification on the respirator or package.
- Not wear respirators into atmospheres containing contaminants for which the respirator is not designed to protect the wearer against.
- Keep track of their respirator so as not to mistakenly use someone else's.

Where To Go For More Information

29 CFR 1910.134—Respirator protection.

29 CFR 1910.134 APPENDIX D—Information for employees using respirators when not required under this standard (Mandatory).

