



Voluntary Respirator Use Fact Sheet for Animal Handlers

The University of Maryland is committed to providing a work environment that is free of recognized hazards. This fact sheet details voluntary respirator use at the University.

What is voluntary respirator use?

Employees who voluntarily use respiratory protective equipment are covered in the University of Maryland Respiratory Protection Program. Voluntary use is choosing to wear a respirator when there is no regulatory or exposure-based requirement. Voluntary use of respirators does not carry the same program requirements as required use.

How can I determine if respirator use is voluntary or required?

The Laboratory Animal Allergen Exposure Control Plan (available at: http://www.essr.umd.edu/research/rest/LAA_ECP.pdf) is a comprehensive hazard evaluation that identifies specific tasks for Animal Handlers where respiratory protection is required. Use of respiratory protection outside of these required tasks, is voluntary. If an employee has questions or concerns, they should contact their supervisor. The supervisor can contact ESSR to review the tasks for further evaluation.

What are the program requirements for voluntary respirator use?

If employees elect to voluntarily use disposable respirators, and if there are no identified inhalation hazards, they can be used as follows:

- Voluntary use of a filtering facepiece (i.e. N95) does not require medical clearance or fit testing prior to use.
- A hazard evaluation must be performed prior to voluntary use of a tight-fitting respirator (i.e. half-face air purifying, full-face air purifying, or supplied air) to determine if use is voluntary or required.
- Voluntary use of a tight-fitting respirator does require medical clearance prior to use (see medical evaluation section).
- The respirator must be cleaned, stored, and maintained so its use does not present a health hazard to the user.
 - This is not required if only disposable filtering facepieces are used.

Employees who choose to voluntarily wear respirators are responsible for reading and following Appendix D of OSHA 29CFR 1910.134, which details respirator limitations and use, as listed on the following page.

If you have further questions about voluntary respirator use, please contact The Department of Environmental Safety, Sustainability, and Risk at 301-405-3960.

The University Respiratory Protection Program is available at the ESSR website:
www.essr.umd.edu

OSHA Voluntary Respirator Use Fact Sheet

Appendix D to Sec. 1910.134

(Non-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 follow 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.