



# HOW TO USE A RESPIRATOR

## A FACT SHEET FOR CLEANUP WORKERS

### WHAT IS A RESPIRATOR?

A respirator is a type of personal protective equipment (PPE). It is worn over the nose and mouth. Some respirators also cover the face and eyes. A respirator can protect you against breathing in harmful contaminants that are in the air - but only if you use it properly.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO WEAR A RESPIRATOR?

Cleanup workers create a lot of dust that gets into the air. This dust is there even if you cannot see it. It may contain mold or chemicals like asbestos or lead. If you inhale (breathe in) this dust, it may make you temporarily or permanently ill. You might become ill right away or sometime in the future. ***Always wear a respirator for cleanup work. This can prevent harmful substances in the air from getting into your body and making you sick.***

### WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF RESPIRATORS?

Disposable



Reusable



***Air Purifying Respirators (APRs)*** use filters or filter cartridges to prevent dangerous substances that are in the air from getting inside your respirator. This allows you to breathe clean air.

***Supplied Air Respirators (SARs)*** prevent air from the workplace from entering your respirator. Instead, clean air comes from a tank on your back or through an airline that brings air in from a clean area.



### WHAT RESPIRATOR SHOULD I USE?

**CLEANUP WORKERS SHOULD WEAR AIR PURIFYING RESPIRATORS. DO NOT USE DUST MASKS OR SURGICAL MASKS. THEY ARE NOT RESPIRATORS. THEY WILL NOT PROTECT YOU AGAINST HARMFUL CHEMICALS OR MOLD.**

Federal law requires your employer to provide you with the right respirator for the job, at no cost to you. If this does not happen, use the best respirator you can get. You should use an N95 disposable respirator (or a better one). These are good for small mold jobs (for example, working with less than 3 sheets of sheet rock per workday). Disposable N95 respirators do *not* protect you *against* harmful chemicals like asbestos, lead, or petroleum products.

***ALWAYS WEAR AN N95 DISPOSABLE RESPIRATOR OR BETTER.***

## **TYPES OF AIR PURIFYING RESPIRATORS:**



Disposable N95



Disposable N95  
with Exhalation Port

**Disposable N95 Air Purifying Respirator** (basic protection, cheapest, easiest to find). Must be labeled with the words “NIOSH” and “N95.” If it does not have these words, don’t use it!

**Half Face Air Purifying Respirator with replaceable N100, P100, or R100 filter cartridges** (better protection, more expensive, harder to find).



**Full Face Air Purifying Respirator with replaceable N100, P100, or R100 filter cartridges** (still better protection, more expensive, harder to find).

**Full Face Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) with replaceable N100, P100, or R100 filter cartridges** (best protection, most expensive, hardest to find).



*For even better protection with half face or full face respirators, or with full face PAPRs, use combination filters labeled “P100” and “organic vapor.”*

### **CAN ANYONE USE A RESPIRATOR?**

Using a respirator makes your lungs and heart work harder. ***If you have a lung or heart condition, wearing a respirator may be dangerous for you.*** If a medical condition prevents you from wearing respirator, you cannot protect yourself against breathing in harmful contaminants in the air. ***If you have facial hair, you may not be able to wear a respirator.*** The edge of a respirator must form a tight seal against your skin. If the edge of a respirator rests on facial hair, contaminants can leak into the respirator. You must shave off any facial hair that touches the edge of the respirator.

### **HOW CAN I BE SURE THAT MY RESPIRATOR FITS PROPERLY?**

If your respirator does not fit correctly, it will not protect you from harmful contaminants. There are 2 ways to make sure that your respirator fits properly:

- You should be *fit-tested* by a qualified person at least once a year. This will identify the respirator make, model, style, and size that is best for you. (Your employer is required by law to provide fit-testing.)
- You should conduct a “seal check” *every time* you put on a respirator. This will help you make sure it fits and is properly positioned on your face.

## HOW DO I CONDUCT A “SEAL CHECK”?

### *If you are using a cartridge respirator -*

- *To check for leaks when exhaling (breathing out), completely cover the exhalation port with the palm of your hand so that no air can flow out. Exhale more strongly than usual. If the mask bulges slightly and you do not feel any air flow escaping across your face, the respirator fits properly when exhaling.*
- *To check for leaks when inhaling (breathing in), completely cover the filter cartridges with the palms of your hands so that no air can flow in. Inhale more strongly than usual. If the mask collapses slightly and you do not feel any air entering the mask across your face, the respirator fits properly when inhaling.*



### *If you are using a disposable N95 respirator -*

- *Firmly cover the mask with the palms of your hands. Inhale and exhale more strongly than usual. If you do not detect any air flow in or out around the edges of the respirator, the respirator fits properly. (If the mask has an exhalation port, be sure to cover the port when you breathe out.)*



exhalation ports



## WHEN SHOULD I CHANGE MY FILTER CARTRIDGES OR MY DISPOSABLE RESPIRATOR?

At the beginning of *each work day*, you should use either a new set of filter cartridges or a new disposable N95 respirator. During the work day, if it gets harder to breathe while wearing your respirator, go to a clean outdoor area and put on a new disposable N95 respirator or use new filter cartridges.

**The OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard requires your employer to assess hazards and to provide fit-testing, medical evaluation, and training. All employers, including contractors, must comply with this law.**

***OSHA protects all workers, including undocumented workers.***