

# VOLUNTARY USE OF RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

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## INTRODUCTION

### PURPOSE

The respiratory protection program at Duke is intended to protect employees against recognized health hazards. However, some employees may be irritated by the presence of non-hazardous air contaminants (such as pollen or animal dander). When use of a respirator will help to alleviate irritation and when the respirator itself is judged to pose no additional risk to the wearer, Duke employees will be allowed to voluntarily use respirators for comfort reasons. This supplement describes responsibilities and procedures for obtaining approval and medical clearance for voluntary respirator use.

### DEFINITIONS

*Definitions can be found in the Respiratory Protection Policy, Section II, Chapter 2.*

### RESPONSIBILITIES

Departments with employees who desire to use respiratory protection for comfort reasons shall:

- Notify the Occupational and Environmental Safety Office (OESO) with the names and Duke ID numbers of affected employees as well as the manufacturer and style of the proposed respirators.
- Ensure that masks are not dirty or contaminated.
- Ensure that use of respirators does not interfere with employees' ability to work safely.
- Provide information contained in Appendix A of this Supplement to all employees who voluntarily use respirators. This information is also contained in the OESO brochure, "Voluntary Respirator Use at Duke", and in the online course, "Respirator Training for Voluntary Users."
- Report any problems to the OESO.
- Ensure that respirators are not used without the approval of the OESO.

Employees who choose to use respiratory protection shall:

- Obtain permission from their department and the OESO to use a respirator.
- Read and understand the information contained in Appendix A of this Supplement. This information is also available in the OESO brochure, “Voluntary Respirator Use at Duke”, and in the online course, “Respirator Training for Voluntary Users.”
- Inspect their respirators before each use, and clean them after each use.
- Report any problems to their supervisor.

The OESO shall:

- Approve all voluntary respirator use to ensure that selected respirators will not pose an additional risk to employees. Only NIOSH approved respirators will be allowed.
- Determine if medical clearance is necessary for voluntary respirator users based on the type of respirator selected.
- Maintain records of all voluntary respirator use at Duke.
- Conduct periodic reviews of departmental policies on respirator storage and use.

Employee Occupational Health and Wellness shall conduct health screening of voluntary respirator wearers if the OESO determines that the selected respirator may cause physical stress to the wearer.

## PROCEDURES

### GENERAL

In their jobs at Duke, some employees may perform tasks which cause respiratory discomfort but which do not pose a health risk. In these cases, the OESO will not require that respiratory protection be worn, but individuals may request that their departments provide respirators or they may purchase their own respirators if this is approved by the OESO. Individual employees who choose to use respiratory protection for comfort reasons (such as allergy prevention) must obtain permission from the OESO. Departments which provide comfort respirators for their employees must furnish to the OESO information about the types of respirators being used, the tasks being performed while respirators are worn, and the names and Duke ID numbers of employees wearing the respirators.

### HEALTH EVALUATION

The use of some respirators may impose an additional stress on the worker. Voluntary use of respirators (except filtering facepiece respirators) requires medical clearance. Employees who voluntarily wear respirators (other than filtering facepieces) must fill out a medical clearance questionnaire and send it to Employee Occupational Health and Wellness (EOHW). EOHW will

determine if the respirator poses a risk to the employee, and whether or not the employee is physically able to perform assigned tasks while wearing the respirator.

**RESPIRATOR SELECTION**

Comfort respirators will be approved only when they are appropriate for protection against the irritating substance and when they pose no health risk to the wearer. The OESO will make alternate recommendations if the selected respirator is inappropriate for the proposed use.

**FIT TESTING**

Fit-testing is not required for voluntary respirator wearers. However, individuals voluntarily wearing tight-fitting respirators may request that the OESO perform a fit test to ensure that the respirator achieves an effective mask-to-face seal. Fit-testing will be performed by OESO only if the selected respirator is compatible with OESO testing equipment.

**MAINTENANCE**

Each respirator user will have the responsibility for maintaining his/her own respirator. Parts should be replaced when needed. Respirators provided by departments for non-routine, general use will be maintained by the supervisor or a competent designated person.

*INSPECTION*

All respirators will be inspected before and after each day's use by the respirator wearer.

*CLEANING, DISINFECTION AND STORAGE*

Respirators will be cleaned and disinfected after each use according to procedures for specific respirators. Respirators will be stored away from any contamination in a clean, sanitary place, on a flat surface in a sealed container. Respirators must not be exposed to extreme temperatures. It is not acceptable to hang a respirator by its straps.

*REPAIR*

Respirators needing repair will be repaired by the competent designated person using approved replacement parts only. When employees provide their own respirators, they must repair or replace them as needed. Repairs must be made in a manner that maintains the respirator's NIOSH approval.

## TRAINING

Employees who choose to use respiratory protection must be familiar with the information contained in Appendix A to this Supplement, found on the following page. This information is also contained in the OESO brochure, “Voluntary Respirator Use at Duke”, and in the online course, “Respirator Training for Voluntary Users”.

## REFERENCES

Code of Federal Regulations, Title 29, Part 1910.134 (OSHA), *Respiratory Protection*  
American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z88.2, *Practices for Respiratory Protection*

## **APPENDIX A: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES USING RESPIRATORS VOLUNTARILY\***

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 respirator's 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.

*\* This information is taken from Appendix D to 29 CFR 1910.134, OSHA Respiratory Protection*