

# RESPIRATOR USE IN LABS

## GENERAL INFORMATION

- Most airborne hazards in labs can be minimized with engineering controls (e.g., chemical fume hood or other local exhaust) and good work practices. These methods will limit exposures for all employees in the lab and will reduce the chances of contaminating laboratory surfaces. In some cases, additional protection in the form of a respirator may be recommended or desired.
- The most common use of respirators in labs is for prevention of animal allergy symptoms, as required or recommended by Employee Occupational Health and Wellness (EOHW).
- OESO can help find ways to minimize exposures without using respirators. For example, OESO recommends [safe weighing practices](#).
- Any respirator use (even N95s) requires approval by OESO.
- OESO will determine if the use is required or voluntary.
- OESO reviews respirator use for the following reasons:
  - ⇒ Compliance: To ensure that all of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements for both voluntary and required users are being met.
  - ⇒ Protection: To ensure that people are using the appropriate respirator for a particular hazard. For example, N95 respirators will only work for particulates and will not protect against exposure to chemical gases or vapors. Surgical masks or comfort masks should not be used where a true respirator is needed.
  - ⇒ Fit test/check: To ensure that the respirator offers a good fit for the user, OESO performs this service. Otherwise, the user may not be adequately protected.

## REASONS TO USE A RESPIRATOR

- Prevention of animal allergy symptoms (in consultation with EOHW)
- Protection from hazardous vapors or powders when local exhaust (such as a biological safety cabinet or fume hood) is not available

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