Using Filtering Facepiece Respirators (2017) (commonly known as “disposable dust masks”)

Air purifying respirators (APR) can be an effective method of protection against specific hazards when properly selected and worn. It is critical to assess all potential hazards in order to understand the limitations of the APR and to be clear on the reason for wearing it—Is it protection against hazardous materials or for comfort?

Filtering Facepiece Respirators (FFP), or disposable dust masks, are designed to filter only particulates (liquid or solid airborne contaminants, including dusts, fumes, mists, fibers, fog, pollen, smoke, spores and bioaerosols). **FFP respirators will NOT protect against gases or chemical vapors.** Some manufacturers have incorporated carbon or charcoal layers in the FFP masks; this is only for comfort against nuisance odor. These added layers are not adequate for toxic levels of gases or chemical vapors and they must not be used for those purposes.

FFP respirators are sometimes purchased without realizing that these simple devices are still part of an overall Respirator Program. Their use needs to be reviewed by your supervisor and personal (or company) physician to be sure that they are appropriate for the hazard, and for your personal medical history.

FFP respirators that are purchased for a comfort reason are often mistakenly worn in a different, more hazardous operation, mainly because staff has not been informed of the limitations of this type of respirator. Your employer is still responsible for the proper selection and use of any type of personal protective equipment, even disposable FFPs.

If your work requires vapor- and/or gas-removing APR in addition to particulates, your mask must have replaceable cartridges or canisters to remove specific vapor/gas contaminants attached singularly or in combination to an elastomeric facepiece AND a HEPA filter incorporated into the cartridge or a dust/mist pre-filter.

**If your employer and medical practitioners approve of the use of FFPs for your task, you should know that:**

- **If the FFP is required by occupational exposure limits** to protect you from hazardous exposures, you need to be medically evaluated, properly fitted, and trained. See Health & Safety web link for Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaires.
- **If the FFP respirator is worn only for comfort** (i.e. when your exposures are well below the maximum allowable occupational exposure limits established by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), or in Canada, by the applicable jurisdiction) you still need to wear it safely and keep it clean.
- FFP respirators do not provide oxygen and must not be used in environments that are Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH.)
- No filter will protect you if it doesn’t provide a tight face seal or is worn over a beard.
- Read all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, and warnings as to the FFP limitations. The packaging for the FFP will tell you for what the respirator is to be used.
- **DO NOT BUY OR USE AN FFP UNLESS THE “NIOSH” LABEL IS ON THE BOX, PACKAGE OR FFP ITSELF (e.g., NIOSH TC number on the strap).** The packaging and respirator must state that the FFP is certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Dispose when it becomes damaged, dirty or is difficult to breathe through. If it doesn’t require disposal after your shift, store it in a zip lock bag.
- Particulate filters are rated for both how well they holdup in oil-mist atmospheres and how well they capture particles, resulting in 9 types of filters:
  - Three categories of resistance to filter efficiency degradation by oil:
    - N (Not resistant to oil)
    - R (Resistant to oil)
    - P (Oil proof)
  - Three levels of filter efficiency:
    - 95% (called “95”)
    - 99% (called “99”)
    - 99.97% (called “100”)
- The most commonly used types are either “N95” (95% efficiency) or “P100” (almost 100% particle capture). N95 might be appropriate for common cleaning tasks, possibly mold or insect frass unless you are highly allergic. N or P100 might be worn for protection against allergens or heavy dusting.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE USE OF FILTERING FACEPIECE (“DUST MASK”) RESPIRATORS, OR IF YOUR JOB TASKS CHANGE, CONTACT YOUR SUPERVISOR SO THEY CAN BE SURE THE RESPIRATOR IS PROVIDING YOU WITH THE COMFORT AND PROTECTION THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU AND THE JOB.**

For more information visit: www.culturalheritage.org/HealthandSafety