



## VOLUNTARY USE OF FILTERING FACEPIECES (DUST MASKS)

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Loss Control and Prevention Section*

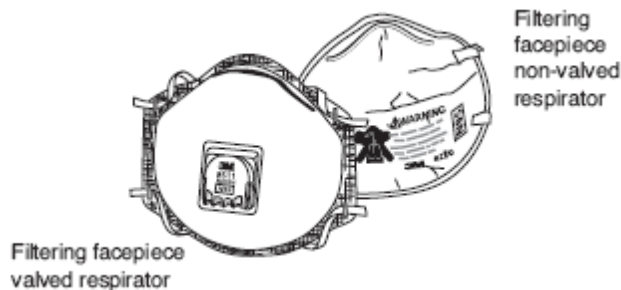
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The use of filtering facepieces (a.k.a. dust masks) may enhance employee comfort. When used on a voluntary basis, Cal/OSHA requires minimal precautions. The purpose of this bulletin is to provide an overview of filtering facepieces, voluntary use, and the requirements under Title 8 California Code of Regulations Section 5144, Respiratory Protection (<http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5144.html>).

A filtering facepiece is defined by Cal/OSHA as a “negative pressure particulate respirator with a filter as an integral part of the facepiece or with the entire facepiece composed of the filtering medium.” Filtering facepieces are distinguished from ordinary dust masks by the double straps and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) approval rating (e.g. N95). They often have an exhalation valve on the front that looks like a button. Examples are below:



Voluntary use of a filtering facepiece means that the use is purely by choice, not for compliance with Cal/OSHA Permissible Exposure Limits (PELs) or for protection against a potentially harmful substance that does not have a PEL. Examples of voluntary use are an employee with seasonal allergies wearing a filtering facepiece for comfort while working outdoors and an employee wearing a filtering facepiece while sweeping a floor.

When the use of filtering facepieces is voluntary, Cal/OSHA has three requirements. The employer must:

- Ensure that filtering facepieces are not dirty or contaminated.
- Ensure that their use does not interfere with employee's ability to work safely.
- Provide employees with the information contained in Appendix D of the Respiratory Protection standard (<http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5144d.html>). Please see page two of this bulletin for a copy of Appendix D.

Note: if ordinary dust masks (single strap) are used, the above requirements do not apply. Dust masks should be used according to the manufacturer's instructions.

**Subchapter 7. General Industry Safety Orders**  
**Group 16. Control of Hazardous Substances**  
**Article 107. Dusts, Fumes, Mists, Vapors and Gases**  
**§5144. Respiratory Protection.**

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**Appendix D to Section 5144: (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 heed 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 designated 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.

NOTE

Authority cited: Section 142.3, Labor Code. Reference: Section 142.3, Labor Code.

HISTORY

1. New appendix D to section 5144 filed 8-25-98; operative 11-23-98 (Register 98, No. 35).