

Voluntary Respirator Use

OAR 437 • Division 2/I • Division 3/E



Voluntary use of a respirator means an employee chooses to wear a respirator when use is not required by the employer or by an OSHA standard. Even though employees may use respirators on a voluntary basis, adverse health effects may result. Therefore, the employer is required to implement elements of a respiratory protection program to protect employees. The elements are based on the type of respirator.

Employers do not have to pay for respirators for voluntary use. Appropriate facilities and time to clean, disinfect, maintain, and store respirators must be provided.

For overviews of elements of respiratory protection plans, consult the [Small Entity Compliance Guide](#) from federal OSHA and the publication [Breathe Right!](#) from Oregon OSHA.

Substance-Specific Rules

Where Oregon OSHA has adopted rules that regulate individual substances such as asbestos and lead, the medical provisions and the respirator-selection requirements, if specified, must be followed instead of 1910.134, Respiratory Protection. All other aspects of 1910.134 are applicable. Substance-specific standards may not allow provisions for voluntary respirator use.

The following table summarizes requirements for respirators, based on the type of voluntary respiratory protection used. Note that fit testing is not required for voluntary use of any type of respirator. Medical evaluation, paid for by the employer, is required for use of all respirators—with the exception of filtering face-piece (dust mask) type respirators used voluntarily. Providing information to employees from Appendix D of the Respiratory Protection standard is

1910.134 Respiratory protection requirement	*Filtering face-piece (dust mask)	Elastomeric negative-pressure respirator	Powered-air purifying	Supplied-air respirator
Written respiratory program	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Medical evaluation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fit testing	No	No	No	No
Annual training	No	No	No	No
Appendix D	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clean, inspect, maintain, store	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



* A National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)-certified filtering face-piece is a paper-based particulate respirator that uses a filtering medium for dust, fumes, or mists. It is not appropriate for vapor, gases, or oxygen deficiency. Refer to manufacturers' instructions for use and limitations. An N95 respirator is an example of a filtering face-piece respirator.

Oregon OSHA recommends NIOSH-certified respirators, and NIOSH-approved filters, cartridges, and canisters for voluntary use. NIOSH-certified respirators are clearly marked and use a letter-and-number system specified in 42 CFR Part 84. For an overview, see the NIOSH guide [Selection and Use of Particulate Respirators](#).

More information

- ☞ [Division 2/I](#)
- ☞ [Division 3/E, Personal Protective and Life Saving Equipment](#)
- ☞ [Division 2/I, Respiratory Protection](#)
- ☞ [Division 5, Maritime Activities](#)
- ☞ [Division 7/D, Respiratory Protection](#)
- ☞ [Oregon OSHA's substance-specific rules](#)

required for all types, as is following a schedule to clean, inspect, maintain, and store respirators.

Evaluation of Respiratory Hazards

Employers are responsible for evaluating respiratory hazards. This must include a reasonable estimate of employee exposure and include identification of the contaminant's chemical state and physical form. Where the exposure cannot be reasonably estimated, the employer shall consider the atmosphere to be IDLH (immediately dangerous to life and health). Determination of the employee exposure level may incorporate air sampling data, objective data, and data regarding the physical and chemical properties of the contaminant while considering worksite conditions such as room dimensions, air-exchange rates, work practices, and the like.

If air monitoring is required by a substance-specific rule, then the employer must comply with the rule.

It is the employer's responsibility to evaluate workplace hazards, including respiratory hazards. Once the employer has established that a respiratory hazard does not exist, voluntary respiratory protection may be used if the employer allows it.

Respiratory hazards can be evaluated using:

- Air monitoring for the air contaminant in question. The employer must monitor if substance-specific rules require it.
- Objective data from industry studies, trade associations, chemical manufacturers, etc.



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The Technical Section of Oregon OSHA produced this fact sheet to highlight health and safety programs and rules. The information is intended to supplement the rules and provide best practices to employers.