

Tools for Life – Weekly Health & Safety Meeting



Home Healthy - Home Safe

December 2020

Voluntary Respirator Use

It's not uncommon for employees to approach their supervisor or safety manager about wearing a respirator just because it will make them feel "more comfortable" about work they may be performing. There are two categories of respirator use, Non-Voluntary and Voluntary. Voluntary use is defined by OSHA when a respirator is being used by an employee without the presence of atmospheric hazards and it is not a task that requires a respirator by the employer. There are two types of voluntary use.

Voluntary Use of a "Dust Mask" (filtering face piece) type respirator

The most common type of filtering facepiece respirator used at Apollo is the N-95. To wear an N-95 voluntarily, a supervisor or safety manager must be complete a risk assessment to ensure that wearing this type of respirator does not create more hazards for the tasks to be performed. Once this is completed, the user must be trained on the limitations of the respirator and be provided information from 29 CFR 1910.134 Appendix D. Appendix D provides important information the employee needs to know about wearing a filtering facepiece respirator. Voluntary usage of these respirators does not require an individual a medical evaluation or fit test.

Voluntary Use of Respirators other than "Dust Masks"

These types of respirators, such as tight-fitting negative-pressure respirators, place a much greater physiological burden on employees so OSHA requires more of employers when allowing their use even on a voluntary basis. An evaluation of use and reasons for using must be completed by a supervisor or safety manager. Because of the physical strain some respirator use puts on individuals, it is required that a user must be fit tested and medically cleared for the specific respirator they intend to use. Training and the Appendix D must be provided in this instance as well. Also, even though the use is voluntary, your employer is required to ensure the correct filters are being used, the respirator is being cleaned and stored properly, and that the user is maintaining a clean shave for proper fit.

Common reasons for voluntary use of respirators:

- Dust
- Allergies
- Grinding
- Germs
- Welding
- Irritation to certain smells

HEALTHY OR SAFETY REMINDER: Verify that when using a respirator, you are using the correct filters to protect against the hazards you are working around. For instance, using a filter designed for particulates will not protect you against vapors like spray paint. This is true for personal use as well.

Discussion Points/Quiz Questions:

1. Can you go buy your own respirator tonight, and use it tomorrow without any training, medical clearance or fit testing?
2. Do NIOSH N95 respirators provide any protection level for the user?
3. Do you know who to ask if you wanted help evaluating the use of respirator protection?