

N95 Mask Commonly Asked Questions (9/10/19)

Q: What is an N95 mask?

A: An N95 mask is a disposable filtering facepiece respirator with two straps. When worn properly (with the mask making a tight seal with the user's face), it can protect against hazardous airborne particles. N95 masks do not protect against gases, vapors and cannot be used for asbestos, and they do not provide oxygen. The "N" designation means the mask is not resistant to the effects of oil mists. For instruction on using filtering facepieces, see [Using Disposable Respirators](#) in English and Spanish.

Q: When and how should an N95 mask be worn?

A: When working conditions include harmful exposure to airborne contaminants such as wildfire smoke. The masks will not protect the user if the mask does not make a tight seal with the user's face due to factors such as facial hair that interferes with the seal or the mask not being put on correctly.

DO

DON'T



Q: Is an employer required to provide N95 masks to workers?

A: The employer must first determine whether respirator use is **voluntary** or **required**. Employers are **required** to provide respiratory protection **if the working conditions include harmful exposures**. Along with providing the respirators, the employer must have a written respiratory protection program that addresses: proper selection of respiratory equipment; employee training; medical evaluation of an employee's ability to wear a respirator; ensuring proper fit of the respirators; and proper respirator use, storage, and cleaning. The employer must also follow all other applicable requirements in [section 5144](#).

Where it's reasonable to anticipate employee exposure to wild fire smoke, employers are required to provide employees with respirators for voluntary use in accordance with section 5144 when the current AQI for PM 2.5 is 151 or higher but less than 500. Use of respirators becomes mandatory when the current AQI for PM2.5 exceeds 500. Reference [section 5141.1](#).

When protecting employees from wildfire smoke when the AQI is greater than 500, the employer must provide respirators with an assigned protection factor, as listed in section 5144, such that the PM2.5 levels inside the respirator correspond to an AQI less than 151. When the AQI is greater than 535, a respirator with an assigned protection factor greater than 10 (not a disposable dust mask) is required. (*Continued on next page*)

Q: Can an employer distribute N95 masks to workers?

A: Where respirator use is **voluntary**, the employer may provide respirators at the workers' request, or permit workers to use their own respirators. In this situation, employers are not required to have a written respiratory protection program or medically evaluate and fit test workers. However, the employer must ensure that the workers' use of a respirator will not create a hazard. The employer must also provide respirator users with the information contained in California Code of Regulations, Title 8, [section 5144](#), [Appendix D](#), and must follow all other requirements in [section 5144](#), subsection (c)(2).

Where it's reasonable to anticipate employee exposure to wild fire smoke, employers are required to provide employees with respirators for voluntary use in accordance with section 5144 when the current AQI for PM 2.5 is 151 or higher but less than 500. Reference [section 5141.1](#). The employer must also provide training to employees that contains the information of [section 5141.1 Appendix B](#).

Q: Can workers bring in their own N95 masks?

A: Where respirator use is **voluntary**, the employer may permit workers to use their own respirators or provide respirators at the workers' request. In this situation, employers are not required to have a written respiratory protection program or medically evaluate and fit test workers. However, the employer must ensure that the workers' use of a respirator will not create a hazard. The employer must also provide respirator users with the information contained in California Code of Regulations, title 8, [section 5144](#), [Appendix D](#), and must follow all other requirements in [section 5144](#), subsection (c)(2).

Where it's reasonable to anticipate employee exposure to wild fire smoke, the employer can allow employees to use their own respirators when the current AQI for PM2.5 is less than 151. Reference [section 5141.1](#).

Q: Where can employers and workers obtain N95 masks?

A: N95 masks can be purchased from online retailers and from businesses such as hardware stores and industrial supply stores. N95 masks from federal, state, and local agencies are sometimes available at various locations in response to recent wildfires, such as the California [Governor's Office of Emergency Services](#) (Cal OES).

Q: Where can employers and workers find additional information?

A:

- Using Disposable Respirators www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH/wildfire/n95EngSpan.pdf
- Section 5144 Respirator Protection www.dir.ca.gov/Title8/5144.html
- Section 5144 Appendix D *Guide to Respiratory Protection at Work* www.dir.ca.gov/Title8/5144d.html
- Section 5141.1 *Protection from Wildfire Smoke* www.dir.ca.gov/Title8/5141_1.html
- Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) wildfirerecovery.org/general-info/air-monitoring/
- Worker Safety and Health in Wildfire Regions www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Worker-Health-and-Safety-in-Wildfire-Regions.html
- Cal/OSHA's Respiratory Protection publication www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/respiratory.pdf
- AirNow airnow.gov/
- U.S. Forest Service Wildland Air Quality Response Program wildlandfiresmoke.net/outlooks
- California Air Resources Board ww2.arb.ca.gov/homepage
- Local air pollution control district ww2.arb.ca.gov/air-pollution-control-districts
- Local air quality management district ww3.arb.ca.gov/capcoa/dismap.htm