

Using Filtering Facepiece Respirators (more commonly known as "disposable dust masks")

Prepared by the AIC Health and Safety Committee

Respirators are an effective method of protection against specific hazards when properly chosen and worn. Even when your exposures are well below the maximum allowable health limits established by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the use of respirators may offer you an added level of comfort and protection. Most departments purchase "dust masks" 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. "Dust masks" that are purchased for a comfort reason, and not tracked by your supervisor or left in storage on a common shelf, are often mistakenly worn in a different, more hazardous operation, mainly because staff have 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 "disposables".

If your employer and medical practitioner have approved the use of filtering facepiece respirators (FFP) or "dust masks" for your use in your job, you should know the following:

- ✓ If the FFP/dust mask is worn voluntarily for extra comfort and protection, not because there is an overexposure risk, you still need to wear it safely and keep it clean. If you don't dispose of it after your shift, store it in a ziplock bag and dispose when it becomes dirty.
- ✓ If the FFP/dust mask is required by health standards to protect you from hazardous exposures, you need to be medically evaluated and properly fitted for even the disposable respirator type. See AIC H&S web site for link to OSHA Respirator Medical Evaluation Questionnaire.
- ✓ The FFP/dust mask is designed to filter exactly that: Dust and particulates. It will **NOT** protect you against gases or chemical vapors.
- ✓ Filters are rated for how well they holdup in oil-mist atmospheres and how well they capture particles. The most commonly used types are either a "N95" (95% efficiency) or "P100" (almost 100% particle capture). N95 might be appropriate for common cleaning tasks, particulates (not highly toxic metals: for these you need an elastomeric half-or full face air purifying respirator, as minimum), possibly mold or insect frass unless you are highly allergic to these. P100 might be worn for protection against allergens or heavy dusting. **NOTE: 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/dust mask's limitations. The packaging for the FFP/dust mask will tell you what the respirator is to be used for, and 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. **DO NOT BUY OR USE UNLESS THE "NIOSH" LABEL IS ON THE BOX, PACKAGE OR FFP ITSELF (e.g., NIOSH TC number on the strap).**

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.