



Respirator Basics

Workers in hazardous atmospheres are required to use respiratory protection. Respirators must be approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and matched to the contaminants to which workers are exposed and to the protection factor required.

Employers are responsible for medical evaluation, training, respirator/cartridge selection, and fit testing for all workers required to wear a respirator.

How Respirators Protect

Respirators remove contaminants from the air. For example, particulate respirators filter out airborne particles: gas masks filter out chemicals and gases. Other respirators supply clean, breathable air from another source. A self-contained breathing apparatus, for example, includes its own air supply.

Single-strap dust masks, which usually are not approved by NIOSH, are not sufficient protection from hazardous atmospheres. While dust masks may be used to block dust, mists and welding fumes, they will not protect the wearer from gases or vapors. Do not use for asbestos or lead.

Source: NIOSH

Safety tips developed based on generally accepted safety standards believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is for general guidance only and should not be relied upon for legal compliance purposes.

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Respirators to Protect Against Asbestos, Lead

- Half-face respirators can be used for protection against most vapors, acid gases, dust or welding fumes.
- Full-face respirators protect against most vapors, acid gases, dust or welding fumes. The face shield protects one's face and eyes from irritants and contaminants.
- Loose-fitting, powered-air purifying respirators contain a fan that pulls air through filters and circulates air throughout the helmet/hood.

Respirator Cartridges

OSHA requires employers to provide a respirator cartridge change schedule. For information on change schedule requirements, see OSHA's Respiratory Protection eTool online: https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/respiratory/change_schedule.html