Respirator Donning, Doffing, and Seal Checks Meeting Kit



FIT TEST AND SEAL CHECK

A user seal check is not the same as a fit test. Fit testing should be performed prior to the user's first time using a respirator and at least once annually thereafter.

The purpose of a user seal check is to verify the respirator has a proper seal and position on the user's face. This should be done every time it is put on.

GENERAL DISPOSABLE FILTERING FACEPIECE RESPIRATOR (N-95 OR DUST MASK)

Donning: First, inspect the respirator to ensure there are no tears or damage to the mask. If you identify any damage, replace it as this type of respirator is disposable. Next, using one hand, place the respirator on your face ensuring the respirator covers the bridge of your nose and cups your chin. Using your other hand, pull the top strap over your head. The strap should rest high at the back of your head. Next, pull the bottom strap over your head. The bottom strap should be placed around your neck and below your ears. It is vital that your nose and mouth are covered by the respirator and the straps are not crossed. If the respirator has a metal nosepiece, use your fingertips to mold the metal piece to the shape of your nose to create the proper seal.

User Seal Check: Two different user seal checks should be performed (positive and negative). To perform the positive seal check, gently exhale to see if the facepiece bulges slightly. To perform the negative seal check, take a quick, deep breath to see if the facepiece collapses slightly. In either of these checks, if air leaks between your face and the face seal, you do not have a proper seal. The respirator should be readjusted, and seal checks above should be repeated. If you cannot create a proper seal, do not enter the hazardous area and seek assistance from a supervisor to determine how to resolve the issue.

Doffing: To take off the respirator, you should remove it without touching the exterior facepiece as it may be contaminated. Refer to your company's policy for procedures to discard the respirator accordingly.

HOW RESPIRATORS WORK

Three key factors are required for a respirator to be effective: (1) the respirator

has to be put on correctly and worn during the exposure; (2) the respirator must fit the user's face snugly to minimize the number of particles that bypass the filter and get into the breathing zone through gaps between the user's skin and the respirator seal; and (3) the respirator filter needs to be highly effective at capturing particles that pass through the filter.

RESPIRATOR USE AT WORK

All employers with employees required to wear a respirator must (1) provide training which covers putting on a respirator and when the respirator should be used; (2) ensure that the respirator is both comfortable and fits the wearer using a fit test protocol conducted by a safety professional; and (3) use a NIOSH-approved respirator demonstrated to meet a certain level of filtration efficiency (e.g., 95% or more). In addition, workers in a complete respiratory protection program, receive a medical evaluation to ensure that they can safely wear their assigned respirator for the hazard and work task.

WRITTEN RESPIRATORY PROTECTION PROGRAM

An employer is required to develop and implement a written respiratory program with required worksite-specific procedures and elements for required respirator use. The written program must include a respirator-selection process; medical evaluations; fit testing; procedures for use; procedures and schedules for cleaning, disinfecting, storing, inspecting, repairing and discarding; procedures to ensure adequate air quality, quantity and flow; training in respiratory hazards; training in use limitations and maintenance; and procedures for regularly evaluating the program's effectiveness.

An employer must evaluate respiratory hazards in the workplace before selecting a respirator. This evaluation must identify contaminants in their chemical state and physical form, and include a reasonable employee exposure-level estimate. If an employer can't identify or reasonably estimate employee exposure, the employer should consider the atmosphere to be immediately dangerous to life and health.

BEST EMPLOYEE PRACTICES FOR RESPIRATOR USE

- Make sure your disposable N95 FFR has been approved by NIOSH or cleared by the FDA for public use.
- If you have been fit tested and use a respirator at work, then use the same respirator model and size at home.
- Closely follow the manufacturer's instructions so that you put the respirator on correctly each time. The manufacturer's instructions on the respirator package or insert will help you to choose the best size of respirator and to wear it right. Clean-shaven faces will allow the respirator to fit tightly.
- Make sure the respirator fits properly, even if not fit tested, by performing a user seal check.
- If you are planning to wear a reusable half-facepiece or full-face respirator and have lung or heart disease, consider talking to your doctor or other medical provider first.
- If possible, take frequent breaks (every hour or so) away from the respiratory hazard. Use this time to stay hydrated and take the respirator off.
- Try to avoid touching the contaminated surface of the N95 FFR (the outer surface) so that you do not transfer potentially harmful particles to your hands.
- When done using the N95 FFR, dispose of it properly so that others (for example, children) cannot come in contact with it.
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for disposing of the respirator. N95 FFRs are disposable and designed to be worn only once. Some situations may allow you to "reuse" or put the same respirator on multiple times, but the respirator performance will degrade over time.

FINAL WORD

It is important that respirators are donned and doffed correctly. After a respirator is put on, seal checks should always be performed to ensure a proper seal has formed. If you are unable to create a proper seal, then you should not enter the hazardous area as you will not have the proper protection.