

**WAC 296-842-11005 Make sure voluntary use of respirators is safe.**

**IMPORTANT :**

Respirator use is **not** voluntary, and the required use sections of this chapter apply, if:

1. You choose to require respirator use.
2. A respiratory hazard, such as exposure to a substance over the permissible exposure limit (PEL) or hazardous exposure to an airborne biological hazard, is present. To evaluate respiratory hazards in your workplace, see chapter 296-841 WAC, Airborne contaminants.
3. Some requirements in this section do not apply if only filtering-facepiece respirators are used voluntarily.
4. Some filtering-facepiece respirators are equipped with a sorbent layer for absorbing "nuisance" organic vapors. These can be used for voluntary use, but are not NIOSH certified for protection against hazardous concentrations of organic vapor.
  - (1) Make sure voluntary respirator use does **NOT**:
    - (a) Interfere with an employee's ability to work safely, such as restricting necessary vision or radio communication; or
    - (b) Create health hazards.

**Note:**

Examples of health hazards include:

1. Skin irritation, dermatitis, or other health effects caused by using a dirty respirator.
2. Illness created by sharing contaminated respirators.
3. Health effects caused by use of an unsafe air supply, such as carbon monoxide poisoning.

(2) Provide all voluntary respirator users with the advisory information in Table 2 at no cost to them.

(3) Develop and maintain a written program that includes the following:

- (a) Medical evaluation provisions as specified in WAC 296-842-14005.
- (b) Procedures to properly clean and disinfect respirators, according to WAC 296-842-22015, if they are reused.
- (c) How to properly store respirators, according to WAC 296-842-17010, so that using them does not create hazards.
- (d) Procedures to make sure there is a safe air supply, according to WAC 296-842-20010, when using air-line respirators and SCBAs.
- (e) Effective training to ensure respirator use does **NOT** create a hazard.

**Exemption:**

If employees use only filtering-facepiece respirators and do so only voluntarily, you do not need to develop and maintain a written program.

(4) Use Table 2 to provide information to employees who voluntarily use any type of respirator.

**Table 2**

**Advisory Information for Employees Who Voluntarily Use Respirators**

- Respirators protect against airborne hazards when properly selected and used. Respirator usage that is required by DOSH or your employer is not voluntary use. With required use, your employer will need to provide further training and meet additional requirements in this chapter. DOSH recommends voluntary use of respirators when exposure to substances is below DOSH permissible exposure limits (PELs) because respirators can provide you an additional level of comfort and protection.
- If you choose to voluntarily use a respirator (whether it is provided by you or your employer) be aware that **respirators can create hazards for you**, the user. You can avoid these hazards if you know how to use your respirator properly AND how to keep it clean. Take these steps:
  - Read and follow all instructions provided by the manufacturer about use, maintenance (cleaning and care), and warnings regarding the respirator's limitations.
  - Choose respirators that have been certified for use to protect against the substance of concern. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) certifies respirators. If a respirator is not certified by NIOSH, you have no guarantee that it meets minimum design and performance standards for workplace use.

**Advisory Information for Employees Who Voluntarily Use Respirators**

- A NIOSH approval label will appear on or in the respirator packaging. It will tell you what protection the respirator provides.
- Keep track of your respirator so you do not mistakenly use someone else's.
- **DO NOT** wear your respirator into:
  - Required use situations when you are only allowed voluntary use.
  - Atmospheres containing hazards that your respirator is not designed to protect against.  
For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against solvent vapor, smoke or oxygen deficiency.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 49.17.010, 49.17.040, 49.17.050, and 49.17.060. WSR 17-18-075, § 296-842-11005, filed 9/5/17, effective 10/6/17. Statutory Authority: RCW 49.17.050 and 29 C.F.R. Subpart Z. WSR 09-19-119, § 296-842-11005, filed 9/22/09, effective 12/1/09. Statutory Authority: RCW 49.17.010, 49.17.040, 49.17.050, 49.17.060. WSR 07-05-072, § 296-842-11005, filed 2/20/07, effective 4/1/07; WSR 03-20-114, § 296-842-11005, filed 10/1/03, effective 1/1/04.]