

Safe Dust Masks vs. Respirators

It is a common misconception that dust masks are not covered by respirator requirements! OSHA considers dust masks, or filtering facepieces, to have the same protection factor as a half-mask respirator; however, not all dust masks provide the same level of protection.

“It’s just a dust mask, not a respirator” ... Wrong!

NIOSH approved—National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health approval is required if your company is requiring the use of a particulate respirator beyond personal comfort.



Typical N-95 dust mask



“nuisance” dust mask

- If it doesn’t have a NIOSH approval notice printed on the respirator or strap, its not likely approved.
- Single strap dust masks are typically no NIOSH approved.

N-95: Tested to provide at least 95% filtering efficiency

P100: Tested to provide at least 99.97% filtering efficiency

No NIOSH approval: untested or unknown efficiency rating

Voluntary Use

- If your employer provides respirators for voluntary use (you are not exposure to hazardous substances that exceed OSHA limits) you should do the following to ensure that the respirator itself isn’t presenting a hazard to you.
 1. Read manufacturer instructions and warnings regarding limitations of the respirator.
 2. Select a NIOSH approved respirator
 3. Do not wear the respirator in areas with contaminants that your respirator doesn’t protect against.
 4. Label and properly store your respirator so as to not confuse it with other employees and to keep it from becoming contaminated.
 5. Read Appendix D to 1910.134—Mandatory information when using respirators when not required.

Required Use

- If you are required to wear a respirator to protect against hazards you will need the following:
 1. Respiratory fit testing
 2. Medical evaluation
 3. Annual Training