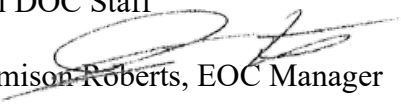




STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
P.O. Box 41100 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1100

January 12, 2022

TO: All DOC Staff
FROM:  Jamison Roberts, EOC Manager
SUBJECT: Voluntary N-95 Respirator Use

On December 28, 2021 Deputy Secretary Sean Murphy [provided information about proper use of masks](#). Today we are expanding availability of N-95 for voluntary use.

N-95 respirators will be available to all staff for voluntary use in the coming days as supplies arrive throughout the organization. Staff will be able to find N-95 respirators alongside available surgical masks at their work locations.

Information about voluntary N-95 respirator use is attached Posters will be posted in workplace locations where masks are dispensed and on safety bulletin boards.

This direction does not take the place of mandatory use N-95 respirator activities that are outlined in the DOC COVID-19 [Personal Protection Equipment \(PPE\) Matrix](#). The expanded availability of voluntary use N-95 respirators is intended to provide an additional level of protection for those that choose to use such equipment.

Voluntary use of N-95 respirators does not require medical clearance nor fit testing. Although the requirements associated with clean shaven in the respirator seal area does not apply for voluntary use, the presence of facial hair in this area may reduce the effectiveness of the respirator. Respirator required positions must comply with required medical clearance, training, fit testing, and clean-shaven requirements.

This is another step in our efforts to continue mitigating the transmission of COVID-19 as we continue to prioritize the health and safety of our staff and those in our care and custody.

For any questions please contact Lori Dale, Safety Officer.

Filtering out Confusion: Frequently Asked Questions about Respiratory Protection

User Seal Check

Over 3 million United States employees in approximately 1.3 million workplaces are required to wear respiratory protection. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) (29 CFR 1910.134) requires an annual fit test to confirm the fit of any respirator that forms a tight seal on the wearer's face before it is used in the workplace.¹ Once a fit test has been done to determine the best respirator model and size for a particular user, a **user seal check** should be done every time the respirator is to be worn to ensure an adequate seal is achieved.



What is a User Seal Check?

A user seal check is a procedure conducted by the respirator wearer to determine if the respirator is being properly worn. The user seal check can either be a positive pressure or negative pressure check.

During a **positive pressure user seal check**, the respirator user **exhales** gently while blocking the paths for air to exit the facepiece. A successful check is when the facepiece is slightly pressurized before increased pressure causes outward leakage.

During a **negative pressure user seal check**, the respirator user **inhales** sharply while blocking the paths for air to enter the facepiece. A successful check is when the facepiece collapses slightly under the negative pressure that is created with this procedure.

A user seal check is sometimes referred to as a fit check. A user seal check should be completed each time the respirator is donned (put on). It is only applicable when a respirator has already been successfully fit tested on the individual.

How do I do a User Seal Check while Wearing a Filtering Facepiece Respirator?

Not every respirator can be checked using both positive and negative pressure. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions for conducting user seal checks on any specific respirator. This information can be found on the box or individual respirator packaging.

The following positive and negative user seal check procedures for filtering facepiece respirators are provided as examples of how to perform these procedures.



How to do a positive pressure user seal check

Once the particulate respirator is properly donned, place your hands over the facepiece, covering as much surface area as possible. Exhale gently into the facepiece. The face fit is considered satisfactory if a slight positive pressure is being built up inside the facepiece without any evidence of outward leakage of air at the seal. Examples of such evidence would be the feeling of air movement on your face along the seal of the facepiece, fogging of your glasses, or a lack of pressure being built up inside the facepiece.

If the particulate respirator has an exhalation valve, then performing a positive pressure check may be impossible. In such cases, a negative pressure check should be performed.

How to do a negative pressure user seal check



Negative pressure seal checks are typically conducted on particulate respirators that have exhalation valves. To conduct a negative pressure user seal check, cover the filter surface with your hands as much as possible and then inhale. The facepiece should collapse on your face and you should not feel air passing between your face and the facepiece.

In the case of either type of seal check, if air leaks around the nose, use both hands to readjust the nosepiece by placing your fingertips at the top of the metal nose clip. Slide your fingertips down both sides of the metal strip to more efficiently mold the nose area to the shape of your nose. Readjust the straps along the sides of your head until a proper seal is achieved.²

If you cannot achieve a proper seal due to air leakage, you may need to be fit tested for a different respirator model or size.

Can a user seal check be considered a substitute for a fit testing?

No. The user seal check does not have the sensitivity and specificity to replace either fit test methods, qualitative or quantitative, that are accepted by OSHA (29 CFR 1910.134). A user should only wear respirator models with which they have achieved a successful fit test within the last year. NIOSH data suggests that the added care from performing a user seal check leads to higher quality donnings (e.g., reduces the chances of a donning with a poor fit).³

Where can I Find More Information?

This information and more is available on the [NIOSH Respirator Trusted-Source webpage](#).

References

1. OSHA [1998]. Respiratory Protection. 29 CFR 1910.134. Final rule. Fed Regist 63:1152-1300.
2. NIOSH [2010]. How to properly put on and take off a disposable respirator. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2010-133 <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-133/pdfs/2010-133.pdf>
3. Viscusi DJ, Bergman MS, Zhuang Z, and Shaffer RE [2012]. Evaluation of the benefits of the user seal check on N95 filtering facepiece respirator fit. J Occup and Environ Hyg. 9(6):408-416.

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Voluntary Use of Respirators WAC 296-842-11005

When an employee/contract staff/incarcerated worker chooses to wear a respirator, and no hazard requiring respirator use is indicated; what must employers do?

WAC states:

- (1) You may provide respirators at the request of employees, if you determine that such respirator use will not in itself create a hazard.
- (2) If you determine that voluntary respirator use is permissible, **you must provide the respirator users with the following information:**

Table 2: Important Information About Voluntary Use of 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. 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 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.

You should do the following:

- (1) Read and follow all instructions provided by the manufacturer about use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirator's limitations.
- (2) Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern. NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 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. A label or statement of certification should appear on the respirator or respirator packaging. It will tell you what the respirator is designed for and how much it will protect you.
- (3) **Do not wear your respirator** into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against solvent vapor or smoke (since smoke particles are much smaller than dust particles). **Do not wear your respirator in required use situations** when you are only allowed voluntary use.
- (4) Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.

No respiratory program is required when filtering-facepiece respirators (dust mask or N95) are the only respirator used and they are used voluntarily. When any other type of respirator is used voluntarily, the employer must provide:

- Medical evaluations.
- Cleaning, storage and maintenance related program elements.

WAC (296-842-10200) Definitions.

Dust Mask means a type of filtering facepiece respirator with one elastic strap.

Filtering facepiece (N95) means a tight-fitting, half-face, negative pressure, particulate respirator with a facepiece mainly composed of filter material without attached cartridges or canisters. Sometimes referred to as a Dust Mask. An N95 usually has two elastic straps.

Respirator means a device, which may or may not be certified by NIOSH, designed to protect the wearer from breathing harmful atmospheres.