

Safety Note # 198

VOLUNTARY RESPIRATOR USE



Airborne contaminants such as wildfire smoke and nuisance dust from outdoor work can cause irritation to the respiratory system. Although the airborne concentration of these materials often falls below OSHA exposure limits, exposure to these irritants should be minimized. Filtering facepiece style respirators such as N95 respirators can provide some level of protection from inhalation of nuisance irritants.

UC ANR employees may wear N95 respirators under voluntary use provisions **only if the amount or type of airborne irritant is not subject to OSHA regulation AND the use of the respirator does not pose a health hazard to the employee.**

Under voluntary use provisions, a medical evaluation and fit test are not required before one can use an N95 respirator. If your employer provides N95 respirators for your voluntary use, or if you provide your own N95 respirator, you need to take certain precautions to be sure that the respirator itself does not present a hazard.

Note: Use of tight-fitting canister-style respirators under voluntary use provisions is not allowed at UC ANR.

UC ANR employees who wish to use N95 masks under voluntary use provisions must complete steps 1-4 below:

1. Complete and document annual training for use of the N95 mask. Supervisors must also review manufacturer's instructions for respirator use with employees. This training may be included in other annual safety training. Online training from EH&S is available here: <https://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=26137>.
2. Notify ANR EHS via the online Voluntary N95 Respirator Registration survey: <https://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=26140>
3. Notify the local safety coordinator or superintendent of the respirator use (specify the model of N95 mask and instances where the mask will be used).
4. Receive a copy of the OSHA-mandated voluntary use document (8CCR5144 App D (voluntary N95 use). A convenient handout is provided on the UC ANR website here: <http://safety.ucanr.edu/files/273360.pdf>

Important points for voluntary use of N95 masks:

- Disposable N95 masks should be discarded at end of the work day or sooner if mask becomes loaded with particulates and difficult to breathe through.
- N95 respirators that are not fit tested will not provide protection from inhalation of hazardous chemicals, vapors, or biohazards. Voluntary respirator use is NOT allowed for protection from airborne biohazards (viruses, bacteria, fungi) unless supported by a task-specific risk assessment documented by UC ANR EH&S.
- People with pre-existing heart and lung conditions, asthma, claustrophobia, or sensory impairment should consult their physician before using N95 masks. Use of N95 masks may cause serious harm or death in people with pre-existing cardiopulmonary conditions.



N95 respirators with exhaust valves

- It is also important to consider that N95 respirators that have not been fit tested may leak and cause airborne contaminants to become concentrated *inside* of the mask. For increased safety and comfort, UC ANR EH&S recommends use of N95 respirator with an exhaust valve to allow exhaled breath and contaminants to leave the mask.

- UC ANR's voluntary use policy only applies to use of N95 respirators by ANR employees and county staff working under ANR supervisors on ANR projects. Voluntary use provisions may be followed for ANR volunteers *working in ANR programs*. All other UC campus employees and outside contractors must follow requirements set forth by their employer and are not allowed to use N95 masks under the UC ANR voluntary provisions.