56. VOLUNTARY USE OF RESPIRATORY PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

This SOP is mandatory for employees who choose to use respirators on the job when respirator use is not dictated under other guidelines, procedures or regulations. This SOP summarizes the generally accepted industry standard outlined in 29 CFR 1910.134 Appendix D. Contact EH&S and request an evaluation of the circumstances of voluntary use to ensure respirator use does not present an undue hazard to the employee.

Employees who voluntarily choose to use any sort or respirator or respiratory protections other than dust masks\(^1\) should receive a medical evaluation at their own expense from their primary care physician to ensure they are able to safely wear the equipment they wish to use. Supervisors must verify employees properly wear and maintain their equipment to ensure the safety of workers.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Respirators are an effective method of protection against designated hazards when properly selected and worn. However, when improperly used, poorly fitted, or not kept clean, the respirator itself can become a hazard to the worker. Workers may choose to wear respirators to avoid chemical exposure, even if the hazardous substance does not exceed the occupational exposure limits. Any time you use a respirator, you need to take the following specific precautions:

- **Read and follow manufacturer instructions** for use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and observe any warnings regarding respirator limitations.
- **Choose respirators certified to protect** against the chemical or contaminant of concern\(^2\).
- **Do not wear your respirator into areas containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed.** For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors, or very small solid fume or smoke particles.
- **Keep track of your respirator** so that you do not mistakenly use someone else’s respirator.
- **Clean your respirator after each use, store it in a clean, dry plastic bag and avoid exposure to temperature extremes.**

---

1 “Nuisance” dust masks must be approved for use by NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as indicated on the product packaging.

2 NIOSH, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, certifies respirators. 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.