



## Are Dust Masks and Respirators the Same Thing?

If it looks like this, OSHA still considers it a **respirator**.



When purchasing a filtering face piece respirator, all OSHA respirator rules apply. The only exception is if the respirator is being used voluntarily. Voluntary use means that there is nothing in the air that exceeds OSHA's permissible exposure limits (PEL), and that wearing the respirator is not necessary to provide safe breathing air. For example, a worker is wearing a filtering face piece respirator because they don't like the smell of someone's cologne.

Provided below are explanations regarding mandatory and voluntary use guidelines:

- **Mandatory use:** If a respirator is required to be worn in order to keep an employee below an OSHA PEL, then the entire OSHA standard applies. This covers filtering face piece respirators all the way up to supplied air respirators. Mandatory use programs require employers to establish and

implement a written respirator program, provide medical evaluation, and fit test their employees.

- **Voluntary use of a ½ mask or full face respirator:** A copy of Appendix D must be given to the employee, and they also need a medical evaluation, written maintenance program, and a program administrator. However, voluntary use of a ½ mask or full face respirator does not require a fit test.
- **Voluntary use of a filtering face piece respirator:** In this case, the only requirements are that the respirator be stored and maintained so that its use does not present a health hazard to the user, and the employer must provide a copy of Appendix D. No program, medical evaluation, or fit test is required.

Each year, thousands of dollars' worth of citations are written because people don't understand OSHA's respirator rules. Don't become another OSHA pay day. You can count on Conney's Safety Services team for answers.

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