

# PESTICIDE SAFETY



Information

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

A No. 5

## Protecting Yourself From Breathing Pesticides in Agricultural Settings

**If you might be exposed to harmful dusts, droplets, or vapors, a respirator can help protect you.**

A respirator is a form of personal protective equipment (PPE). You must wear a respirator anytime the pesticide label, California's rules, or your employer requires one. If the label tells you to "avoid breathing dust, vapor, or mist" and you cannot do this, you may also need to wear a respirator. Your employer must know what type of respirator is required for your work. Your employer must give you, at no cost, a respirator when it is needed and you must wear it.



### CAN ANYONE USE A RESPIRATOR?

Breathing through a respirator can be very hard for some people. People with certain problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or lung disease, may not be able to wear a respirator safely. If you are handling a pesticide and are supposed to use a respirator, your employer must get a doctor's permission before you are allowed to use it. The doctor will review a questionnaire that your employer will have you fill out. The doctor may also examine you. Your employer must tell the doctor what type of respirator you will use, your worksite activities, and what the air temperatures might be while you are wearing the respirator. The doctor must give a report to your employer (and give you a copy) about whether or not you can wear a respirator safely before you use one. Your employer must follow the doctor's written orders. You do not need to be seen by the doctor again unless your health changes or the doctor thinks you need additional checkups. If this happens, notify your employer that you may need to be seen by the doctor again.

**YOU MUST ALWAYS WEAR a respirator anytime the pesticide label or California's rules require one.**

## IF I HAVE A MUSTACHE OR A BEARD, CAN I WEAR A RESPIRATOR?

If you have a beard, a wide mustache, or long sideburns, a respirator cannot protect you properly because it cannot make a tight seal on your face. You cannot have facial hair wherever the mask contacts your face.

If your respirator does not make a tight seal on your face, your employer cannot let you do the work. Your employer can give you a different type of respirator that does not need a tight seal, or can provide a closed mixing system or enclosed cab for some uses (See the A-3 safety leaflet for more information on engineering controls and PPE).

## WHAT ELSE DO I NEED BEFORE I CAN WEAR A RESPIRATOR?

### 1. Fit Testing

After the doctor says you can wear a respirator, and before you use a respirator for the first time, you must be fit tested to make sure the respirator fits your face properly. Respirators come in different sizes. You may need to wear different respirators when you work with different pesticides. It is very important that any respirator you wear properly fits your face. Your employer or someone he or she hires will make sure the respirator fits your face and works to protect you. Fit testing must be done every year you have to wear a respirator, and any time there are changes to the way your respirator fits your face. When checking how your respirator fits your face, wear it in an area where there are no pesticides. If you wear eye glasses to help you see, or safety glasses or goggles to protect you while working, these cannot interfere with the fit of your respirator.

### 2. Training

Your employer must make certain you are trained on:

- Why you need to wear a respirator, and what it can and cannot do,
- How to use, inspect, and take proper care of the respirator,
- How to use a respirator in an emergency, including when the respirator doesn't work right,
- How you may feel if the respirator is not working properly, and
- How to check your respirator fit and seals each time you put on the respirator.

**You must get trained before you can use a respirator and every year you wear a respirator after that.** As part of your training, your employer may ask if your respirator still fits and if the types of respirators you use and the respirator maintenance are still working for you.



## HOW DO I GET THE RIGHT RESPIRATOR?

Most respirators do not really “clean the air.” What they do is cut down the amount of harmful chemicals getting into your lungs. They do this with special filtering materials. There are many kinds of respirators that will protect you from different dangers. The label, California’s rules, or your employer will tell you what kind of respirator to use. To keep you safe, it is important for the respirator to match your work. For example, some pesticides change into vapor, so you might need to wear a half-face respirator with special filters (cartridges) to protect your lungs. In other cases where the pesticide is a dust, a filtering face piece (like the one pictured) may be all that is necessary to protect you, or you might need to have a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) to make sure you have clean breathing air.

The respirator you wear must have the letters “NIOSH” somewhere on it to show that it is an approved mask. NIOSH is the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Masks without the NIOSH marking do not provide adequate protection.



## HOW CAN I TELL IF MY RESPIRATOR IS NOT WORKING?

Filters can stop working after a while and the pesticide can either pass through them and you will breathe it in, or the filter can clog up and make breathing very difficult. Because many pesticides do not have a smell or cause any irritation, your employer must tell you when and how often to replace the filters. If you notice a smell, odd taste, burning eyes or throat, or it gets hard for you to breathe, leave the area **RIGHT AWAY**. Go to a safe area that contains no pesticides. Then take off your respirator and look at it carefully. Is it torn, cracked, worn out, or dirty? If it is, ask your employer to replace your respirator. If there are no problems you can see, you may need to change the filter.

## WHEN DO I REPLACE THE FILTER?

You can determine when to replace the filter by following these rules in order (if number 1 doesn't apply, move to number 2, and so on):

1. You notice a smell, taste, or irritation.
2. The directions on the label say so.
3. The respirator maker says it should be replaced when working with a specific pesticide.
4. Replace at the end of each workday if there are no other instructions.



## WHO TAKES CARE OF THE RESPIRATOR?

Your employer must make sure your respirator is inspected before you use it and when you clean it. Your employer can train you how to do this. Your employer must make sure respirators for emergency use are checked monthly and a log of the checks is kept with the respirator. When respirators are broken, your employer must fix them. If they cannot be fixed, your employer must get new ones.

Do not use someone else's respirator. Your employer must give you your own respirator and make sure it gets cleaned and disinfected after use, or give you a respirator that can be thrown away after one use.

Your employer must make sure that all PPE, including respirators, are stored away from pesticides. Respirators also need to be protected from dust, sunlight, and big changes in temperature when stored. Water or certain chemicals can also damage the filters or cartridges. Other chemicals can damage the mask itself. Respirators should be stored so the face piece does not become bent. Hard plastic containers with air tight lids are good storage containers for respirators.

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## WHAT RECORDS MUST MY EMPLOYER KEEP?

Your employer must keep the following as long as you need to wear a respirator and for at least three years after you no longer need to wear one:

- Written respirator program.
- Doctor's evaluation result.
- Training, employee consultation, and fit test records.

Your employer must let you look at these records anytime you want to.



*If you don't get all the information you need in your training or want to make a pesticide use complaint, you should call your County Agricultural Commissioner, or the DPR for more information. You can find the Commissioner's number in your local white pages phone directory, by calling 1-87PestLine, or at: [www.cdpr.ca.gov/exec/county/countymap/](http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/exec/county/countymap/)*

DPR's Regional Offices are:

- Northern (West Sacramento) 916/376-8960
- Central (Clovis) 559/297-3511
- Southern (Anaheim) 714/279-7690



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All safety leaflets are available at:  
[www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/whs/psisenglish.htm](http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/whs/psisenglish.htm)

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