

Wildfire Smoke and Dust Masks at Work



When smoke from wildfires enters your work environment you may have concerns about your comfort or health.

Should workers wear a dust mask?

When the amount of smoke exposure at work isn't likely to exceed occupational exposure limits, you can still ask your employer to allow you to **voluntarily** wear a dust mask.

Dust masks labeled as **N95 or N100**, also known as **respirators**, can provide some reliable protection by filtering out smoke particles in the air but they will not provide protection against the gases or vapors found in smoke.

You can find N95 or N100 dust masks online or at many hardware and home repair stores. Your local health department may also have some available.

Do employers have to provide dust masks for voluntary use?

No, but they may choose to provide them anyway.

Employers allowing voluntary use aren't required to provide a medical evaluation or fit-testing for voluntary users of dust masks, but they are required to provide a free copy of the advisory information sheet found in WAC 296-842-11005 after determining voluntary use is a safe option for their workers.

How do you choose the right dust mask?

Choose a dust mask that has the word "NIOSH" and/or "N95" or "N100" printed on it. These dust masks will have **two straps** that go around your head. **Don't choose a one-strap dust mask or surgical mask** that hooks around your ears; these won't protect you against the fine particles in smoke.



N95 or N100 dust masks can provide some protection from wildfire smoke particles in the air. Straps must go above and below the ears.

Attention!

Using dust masks can make it harder to breathe and possibly make certain medical conditions worse. If you have lung or heart disease or are chronically ill, you should check with a doctor before using a dust mask.



Division of Occupational Safety and Health



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Choose a size that will fit snug over your nose and under your chin to create a good seal to your face.

Don't use wet or dry bandanas or towels or tissue held over the mouth and nose. They won't protect your lungs from wildfire smoke.

5 tips to using a dust mask

1. Follow the manufacturer's written or online instructions for putting on and adjusting the dust mask. It should fit comfortably snug over the bridge of your nose and under your chin with one strap placed below the ears and one strap above.
2. Shape the metal part of the mask so it curves snugly over the top and down the upper sides of your nose.
3. Dust masks will give you the most protective fit on clean-shaven skin.
4. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for storage and reuse of your dust mask. You may not need to use a new one each day if yours is not damaged or dirty on the inside.
5. It is harder to breathe through a dust mask so if use becomes uncomfortable, more frequent or longer breaks may help.

What other steps can an employer take to reduce wildfire smoke at work?

Keep work activities indoors when possible and keep the indoor air as clean as possible. For indoor workplaces, consider ventilation improvements like setting up portable HEPA air-purifiers or installing HEPA-quality filters in HVAC systems, when compatible.

Other options to consider include alternate work assignments or relocation and telecommuting to reduce employee exposure to smoke.

Need more information?

More detailed information about wildfire smoke is available from the CDC at www.cdc.gov/features/wildfires.

To learn about general respirator rules and occupational exposure limits, visit www.Lni.wa.gov/Safety/Rules/Find.

To find resources about specific safety topics like Respirators, visit www.Lni.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/AtoZ.

Upon request, foreign language support and formats for persons with disabilities are available. Call 1-800-547-8367. TDD users, call 360-902-5797. L&I is an equal opportunity employer.



A one-strap paper mask will NOT protect your lungs from wildfire smoke.



A surgical mask will NOT protect your lungs from wildfire smoke.