

Proper Use of a Respirator: Script

AgSafe, Coalition for Health and Safety in Agriculture¹

Selection of the proper respirator for a given exposure is critical. If the pesticide you are exposed to is an irritant to your eyes, nose or throat, a full-face respirator should be worn. For air-purifying respirators, the air-purifying filter or cartridge must be approved by NIOSH/MSHA for use against a specific hazard. Pesticide product labels are the primary source of information on which type of respiratory protection is necessary for use with the product.

The safety modules may be used by anyone with the understanding that credit be given to AgSafe.

UNDERSTAND RESPIRATORY HAZARDS

Dusts, fumes, gases or vapors, and temperature extremes can penetrate and damage your respiratory system. Dust and fumes can irritate your nose and throat, and in some cases, your lungs. (See Figure 1.) Gases and vapors can be absorbed from your lungs into your bloodstream, where they have the potential to damage your brain and internal organs. Very hot or cold air can damage the fine tissues in your mouth and airway and interfere with your normal breathing.

CLEAN YOUR RESPIRATOR REGULARLY

Regular cleaning and inspection prolongs the respirator's useful life and assures you that it is working as efficiently as possible. (See Figure 2.) For personal hygiene and communicable disease prevention, respirators should not be passed from one



Figure 1. Dust and fumes can irritate your nose and throat person to another without first being cleaned and sanitized.

STORE RESPIRATORS IN SEALED, DRY CONTAINERS

When not in use, respirators should be stored to prevent conditions that can deform the face piece, and that protect it from excessive exposure to dust, sunlight, extreme temperatures, excessive moisture or damaging chemicals. Plastic containers with lids can provide adequate storage for respirators. (See Figure 3.)

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Figure 2. Clean your respirator regularly

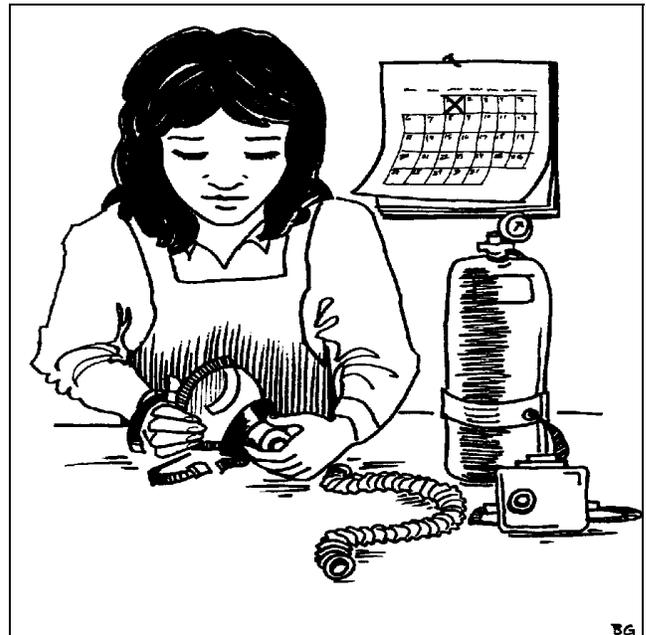


Figure 4. Inspect respirators maintained for emergency use at least monthly

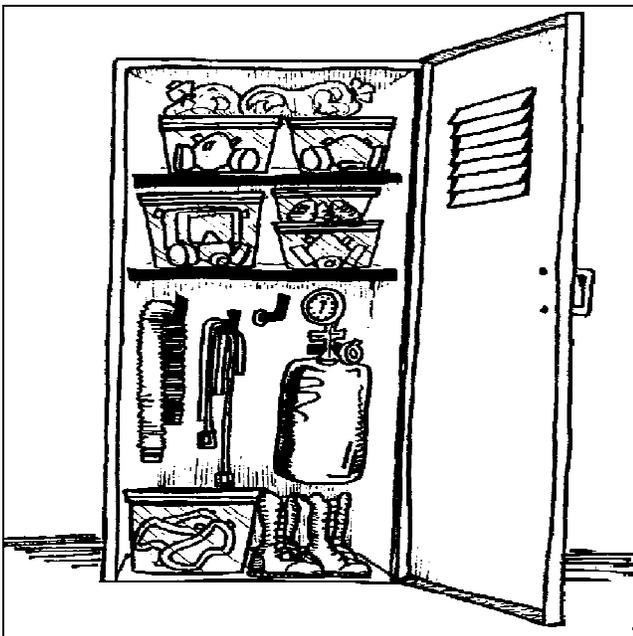


Figure 3. Store respirators in sealed, dry containers

INSPECT RESPIRATORS MAINTAINED FOR EMERGENCY USE AT LEAST MONTHLY

Respirators maintained for emergency use, such as canister gas masks and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCUBA), should be inspected at least monthly to assure reliable operation when it is needed. (See Figure 4.) All respirators should be inspected before each use to ensure cleanliness and that all components are present and operable.



Figure 5. Some individuals find it difficult to breathe through a respirator

BREATHING THROUGH A RESPIRATOR REQUIRES MORE EFFORT

Breathing through a respirator may require more effort than normal breathing. This effort can be difficult for some individuals, for various reasons. (See Figure 5.) If you have a medical limitation that may interfere with your wearing a respirator, be sure



Figure 6. Leave the hazardous area immediately if your respirator ceases to function adequately



Figure 7. Air-purifying respirators, unlike SCUBA gear, do not provide oxygen

to inform your supervisor. You may be required to have an examination by your physician to determine if you are physically able to perform the work while wearing a respirator.

RESPIRATORS DO HAVE LIMITS

Respirators cannot adequately protect a worker from all contaminants under all conditions. In general, the typical half-face air-purifying respirator can be used for protection in environments of up to 10 times the

Permissible Exposure Level (PEL). However, the cartridges or canisters of air-purifying respirators have a limited capacity to protect against toxic gases and vapors in the air. If you detect an odor or taste, or feel your eyes or throat irritated, leave the hazardous area immediately and go to a safe area. (See Figure 6.) The cartridge or canister on the respirator should be changed. The California Department of Food and Agriculture requires that air-purifying elements be replaced daily.

RESPIRATORS DO NOT PROVIDE OXYGEN

Air-purifying respirators (canisters or cartridges) do not provide oxygen. They should not be used in situations where the oxygen content in the air is questionable. (See Figure 7.)

MAKE SURE THE RESPIRATOR FITS SNUGLY ON YOUR FACE

Only a secure and snug fit protects you, so make sure you have the right size respirator for your face. The shape of your face, facial hair and condition of your skin can affect your fit. Try various sizes until you find one where air does not leak in around the edges. You can test the respirator fit by placing the palms of your hands over the cartridges and breathing in for 10 seconds. (See Figure 8.) If fit properly, the mask should suck in tightly around your face.

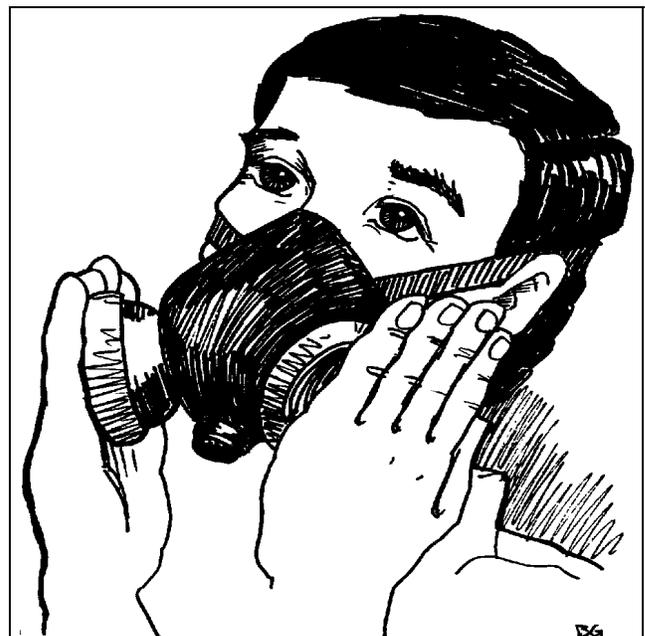


Figure 8. Make sure your respirator fits snugly on your face