

Caring for your respirator

Your health — even your life — may depend upon your respirator. Don't toss it in a corner to collect dust until the next time it's needed. A respirator must be well maintained to work properly.

Respirators must be maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions. The manufacturer includes full instructions for inspection and maintenance with each respirator sold. Refer to the manual or instruction sheet provided with your respirator.

Inspect your respirator before each use and during cleaning. Check for damaged or worn parts. The rated level of protection provided by a respirator may not be achieved if any of the required components are not present or if the wrong components have been substituted. Check the following basic respirator parts:

Facepiece: Look for any warping, and check for dirt, holes, tears, and cracks. The rubber or silicone should be flexible, not stiff.

Yoke: Some respirators have a yoke across the facepiece front that strengthens and supports the facepiece. Check for cracks. Plastic yokes will crack from too much bending. Weak points may show up as black lines on aluminum yokes.

Inhalation and exhalation valves: Make sure the valves are there! Inspect the valve and the valve seat for cracks, tears, dirt, and curling. The valves should be very flexible and lie flat. Missing, curled, or damaged valves won't stop contaminated air from entering the respirator and being inhaled. Make sure that the exhalation valve cover is present.

Head straps: Look for breaks or tears. Stretch the straps to test the elasticity. Replace any straps that have knots in them. Make sure all fasteners are present and work properly.

Cartridge and filter holders: If the respirator uses a snap-on mount to hold the cartridges or filters, all sealing surfaces must be clean. If the respirator uses a screw mount, the threads must not be worn out. If the respirator uses gaskets, make sure they are present.

Cartridges and filters: Look for cracks and other damage such as dents and holes. Replace filters or cartridges if they are heavily coated with paint or other material. Make sure you are using the correct type of filter or cartridge for the hazard. The wrong type of cartridge, or cartridges that are used up, will make the respirator useless.

If inspection shows that any parts of the respirator are missing or defective, or if the respirator is not serviceable for any other reason, it must not be used until it has been repaired.

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