

# PESTICIDE SAFETY



Information

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

N No. 5

## Protecting Yourself From Breathing Pesticides in Non-Agricultural Settings

**Pesticide spray can stay in the air that you breathe.** The best way to avoid breathing pesticides is to wear a protective mask called a respirator.

### When should I wear a respirator?

You must wear a respirator anytime the pesticide label requires one. You may need to wear a respirator if the pesticide label says, "Avoid breathing vapor or mist."

Your employer must give you, at no cost, a respirator when it is needed. You must wear it.

### Can anyone use a respirator?

Breathing through a respirator can be very hard for some people. People with problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or lung disease, may not be able to use 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 use a respirator. The doctor may examine you or review a questionnaire your employer will have you fill out. 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 and your employer must follow the doctor's written orders.

### 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 regular respirator cannot protect you properly because the mustache, beard



**YOU MUST ALWAYS WEAR a respirator anytime the pesticide label requires one.**

or sideburns keep it from making a tight seal on your face. You cannot have facial hair wherever the mask contacts the face.

If your employer does not have a respirator that can make a tight seal on your face, you cannot do the work.

### What training do I need?

Before you use a respirator for the first time, you must be fit tested and trained on when you need to wear a respirator and how to use it safely. You must get trained and fit tested every year. Also, you must be told about what the respirator does and does not protect you from.

### How do I get the right respirator?

There are many kinds of respirators that will protect you from different dangers. The pesticide label or your employer will tell you what kind of respirator to use. 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, a filtering facepiece mask may be all that is necessary to protect you.

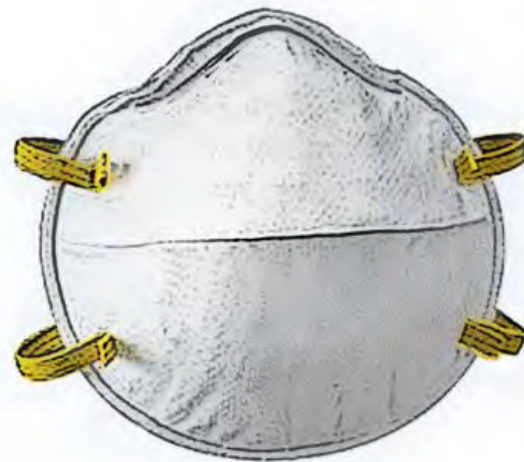
Respirators come in different sizes. It is very important that the respirator fits your face. You must be trained how to check your respirator fit. Your employer or someone he hires will make sure it fits your face. This must be done every year you have to wear a respirator. When checking how your respirator fits your face, wear it in an area where there are no pesticides.

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.

### How can I tell if my respirator is working?

Respirators do not really “clean the air.” What they do is stop most harmful chemicals from getting into your lungs. They do this with special filters. Make sure you have the right kind of filter for the pesticide you are handling. Filters stop working after a while and the pesticide can pass through them and you will breathe it in. 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 there are no problems you can see, you may need to change the filter.

Because many pesticides do not have a smell or cause any irritation, your employer must replace the filter often.



### THE FILTER MUST BE REPLACED WHEN:

1. The directions on the pesticide label say so.
2. The respirator maker says it should be replaced.
3. If you notice a smell, taste, or irritation.
4. At the end of each workday.

Follow the rule that replaces the filter soonest.

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### Who takes care of the respirator?

Respirators should be cleaned and inspected regularly by a person who is trained to do so. Do not use someone else's respirator. Each worker should have their own respirator or you use respirators that can be thrown away after one use.

When respirators are broken, your employer must fix them. If they cannot be fixed, your employer must get new ones.

Store respirators and all personal protective equipment away from pesticides. They need to be protected from dust, sunlight, and big changes in temperature. 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.



*If you don't get all the information you need in your training, you should call your County Agricultural Commissioner, or the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) for more information. You can find the Commissioner's number in your local white pages phone directory, by calling 1-87PestLine, or at:*

<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/exec/county/countymap/>

DPR's Regional Offices are:

- Northern (West Sacramento) 916/376-8960
- Central (Fresno) 559/243-8111
- Southern (Anaheim) 714/279-7690

**Pesticide Complaint?**

**1-87PestLine**  
INFORMATION LINE

1-877-378-5463

A circular icon containing a black telephone handset on a base, representing a phone or call.