



**Q: *Should I wear a dust mask or N95 respirator?***

**A:** Dust masks and surgical masks do not reduce our exposure to particulate pollution. N95 or N100 masks, technically called respirators, can greatly reduce inhalation of smoke particles if they fit properly, which means tightly. Leaky masks do not provide much protection. Properly fitting N95s are a bit hard to breathe through and many not be practical for use over many hours or days. They may also be hard for vulnerable people, such as elderly and people with lung disease, to tolerate. While respirator masks are useful during cleanup of ash, during long-term smoky conditions, the risks are greater than the potential benefits. The best and safest decision you can make is to stay indoors as much as possible. If you must use a respirator mask in an occupational setting, you must be medically screened and fit tested within the last year prior to use. The state health department has information about N95 masks: <https://goo.gl/m1U6GK>

N95 respirators and dust masks are masks made of filtering material that fit over the nose and mouth. The filter material will filter out some of the small particles that may be found in smoke, but only if there is a good fit to the wearer's face. It is also important to know that N95 particulate respirators and dust masks only filter particles, **not toxic gases and vapors.**

Most people find it difficult to use the respirators and masks correctly for general use. For instance, it is impossible to get a good seal on individuals with facial hair. **As a result, the respirator will provide little if any protection, and may offer the wearer a false sense of protection.**

Filtering face-piece respirators and masks can make the work of breathing more difficult and can lead to increased breathing rates and heart rates. They can also contribute to heat stress. **Because of this, respirator use by those with heart and respiratory diseases can be dangerous, and should only be done under a doctor's supervision.** Even healthy adults may find that the increased effort required for breathing makes it uncomfortable to wear a respirator for more than short periods of time. Decisions on whether to use respirators or masks as personal protection for people who must work outside should be made on a case by case, day by day basis.

**Q: *What is the difference between an N95 respirator and dust mask?***

**A:** N-95 respirators are tested and approved by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) for use in certain work places. They respirators are tested to filter particles efficiently and are likely to filter small particles like those found in smoke, more effectively than dust masks, which have not been tested. If an employer requires an employee to wear a respirator, the employee must be trained and fitted to wear a respirator and may only use a NIOSH approved respirator.

**Q: *Will a wet towel or bandana provide any help?***

**A:** A wet towel or bandana may provide some help but it will be very limited. Since wet towels or bandanas may not be sealed to the face and their capacity to filter very small particles is unknown, they will likely provide little protection.

