Interim N95 Program
for Wildland Fire Personnel

FEDERAL WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING PROGRAM

Wildland firefighters are exposed to smoke, ash, dust, engine exhaust, and many other toxic chemicals during normal fire operations. These inhalation hazards can affect short-term performance and long-term health, including increased risks for respiratory and cardiovascular disease. Expanded N95 use and foundational training are an interim step toward a formal respiratory protection program.

N95 respirators can help reduce particulate exposure from smoke in certain situations, but they are only one part of a layered exposure reduction strategy.

Safety, performance, communication, and situational awareness always come first.

What an N95 Respirator Does

An N95 filtering facepiece respirator is a wearable filter that removes particles from the air. Use of a properly fitted N95 respirator on a clean-shaven face with a successful fit test will remove at least 95% of airborne particles (such as those found in smoke).

New respiratory protection training is required for personnel who choose to use an N95 respirator, as well as for all fire managers and supervisors. The N95 Respirator Interim Use for Wildland Fire Personnel training is available on the Wildland Fire Learning Portal.

When an N95 Respirator May Be Helpful

Wildland fire personnel may choose to wear an N95 respirator to provide some level of protection against exposure to particulates. N95s should be worn when exposure to smoke, ash or dust is high, during low- to moderate-intensity work tasks, such as mop-up, cold trailing, patrol and staging, in fire camps, or while driving.

When N95s Should NOT Be Used

N95s should not be worn when contact with direct flame may occur or when performing high-exertion work, such as in firing operations, direct attack, line construction, hiking steep terrain, or saw operations. Additionally, N95 respirators should not be worn during entrapments or shelter deployments, rapidly changing fire conditions, or situations where communications or situational awareness could be compromised.

Important Limitations

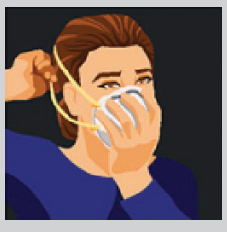
- N95s DO NOT protect against carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, or other toxic gases found in wildfire smoke.
- Facial hair reduces effectiveness by breaking the seal and allowing small particles in; sweat and moisture will also reduce performance.
- The use of N95 respirators may increase breathing effort and heat load.

Practical Tips

- Carry one to three N95 respirators in line gear. Store extra respirators in a clean and dry sealed bag or case.
- Respirators are for one-time use; discard and replace your respirator when dirty, damaged, wet, or a tight seal can no longer be achieved.
- Discontinue use if breathing becomes difficult.
- Local units may procure their own N95 respirators. The national cache system currently stocks N95 respirators and ordering follows standard incident supply processes.

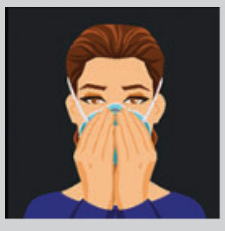
How to Put On and Take Off an N95 Respirator

Hold the mask in your hand and place it over your nose, mouth, and chin.



Place the top strap at the crown of your head and the bottom strap at the hairline on your neck.

Press the nose piece to mold it to the shape of your nose. DO NOT PINCH.



Perform a fit check, placing your hands over the respirator and exhaling. If air leaks, adjust fit.

Remove by pulling the straps. Do not touch the surface of the respirator. Wash your hands.