



## RESPIRATORY PROTECTION PROGRAM – APPENDIX I

# RESPIRATOR CLEANING GUIDELINES

OSHA requires that employers provide each respirator user with a clean, sanitary respirator in good working condition. The employee is then responsible for keeping it that way, but the employer must provide the means to do so. Before a respirator is transferred to another person, it must be cleaned, disinfected, dried, inspected, and tagged.

Disinfection methods must ensure that the respirator is properly cleaned and disinfected in a manner that prevents both harm to the user and damage to the respirator. Choose the disinfection method most feasible for your work area.

*Not applicable for single-use respirators.*

### **CLEANING / DISINFECTION METHODS**

**For respirators shared by more than one user**, or used by one employee and then reissued to another:

1. Immediately remove any contamination using a decontamination method appropriate for the exposure (usually vigorous washing with soap and warm water), then
2. Disinfect respirator by one of the following methods (*observe manufacturer’s instructions*)
  - a. Immersion - Used primarily for disinfection of large numbers of respirators due to time and cost;
  - b. Spray-applied - Useful in the field; requires an additional clean cloth to wipe off; or
  - c. Individual Wipes - Useful in the field; sometimes difficult to maintain solution on surfaces for recommended length of time.
3. Dry, inspect respirator for damage or malfunction, place in a clean sealable storage container, attach tag to respirator that states when decontamination was done and by whom, and store in a clean dry place.

**For respirators issued to only one employee** and maintained by that employee:

1. Immediately remove any contamination using a decontamination method appropriate for the exposure, then
2. Clean the respirator by either washing in detergent, wiping thoroughly with an alcohol pad, or using one of the above disinfection methods, then air-dry, inspect for damage or malfunction, place in clean storage container, and store in a clean dry place.

### **COMMON RESPIRATOR DISINFECTANTS**

**Quaternary Ammonium Compounds (*Recommended*):** The most common respirator cleaning solution; non-corrosive, with good cleaning ability.

**Halogens:** Limited use. The most common halogen solution is bleach. Halogens are powerful disinfectants, but generally too strong and corrosive for respirator cleaning.

**Iodophors:** Limited use. Iodine solutions can stain masks, leave irritating odors and have short shelf-lives.

### **CLEANLINESS TERMS**

**Sterilize** - To kill all microbes, leaving a sterile environment, generally using high heat or strong chemicals. These processes would deteriorate or destroy the materials used in face mask construction.

**Disinfect** - To kill at least all microbes named on the product label, usually benchmark organisms selected for their difficulty to kill. **This process meets OSHA requirements.**

**Sanitize** - To reduce the number of specified organisms to an EPA certified safe level. This process is used in food processing areas where toxicity must be limited due to contact with food preparation surfaces. Sanitizing is recommended by ANSI-Z.88-1992. Does not meet OSHA requirements for respirators.

**Detergent** - A washing agent used to remove industrial debris from the respirator prior to or during disinfection.