Protecting Your Lungs During Cleanup After a Wildfire

It’s important to protect your lungs from health hazards like smoke and ash while cleaning up after a wildfire.

If you cannot avoid the area, a “particulate respirator” can help to protect your lungs during cleanup efforts.

How to Choose the Correct Mask to Protect Your Lungs

• Choose a mask called a “particulate respirator” that has the word “NIOSH” and either “N95” or “P100” printed on it. These are sold at many hardware and home repair stores and pharmacies.
• Choose a mask that has two straps that go around your head. DO NOT choose a mask with only one strap or one with straps that just hook over the ears.
• Choose a size that will fit over your nose and under your chin. It should seal tightly to your face. These masks do not come in sizes that fit young children.
• Do not use bandanas (wet or dry), paper or surgical masks, or tissues held over the mouth and nose. These will not protect your lungs from wildfire smoke or debris.

How to Use a Mask

• Place the mask over your nose and under your chin, with one strap placed below the ears and one strap above.
• Pinch the metal part of the mask tightly over the top of your nose.
• The mask fits best on clean-shaven skin. Keep your face clean and shaven.
• Throw out your mask when it gets harder to breathe through or if the inside gets dirty. Use a new mask each day if you can.
• It is harder to breathe through a mask, so take breaks often if you work outside.
• If you feel dizzy or nauseated, go to a less smoky area, take off your mask, and get medical help.
• If you have a heart or lung problem, consult with your doctor before using a mask.
• Remove earrings and jewelry before donning or doffing equipment to prevent catching them on the respirator.
• Check in a mirror to ensure that your respirator fits properly.

N-95 and P100 masks do not protect against vapors or fumes.