

# **NIOSH Respiratory Protective Device Information**

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**Information regarding damaged or degraded head straps on previously stockpiled NIOSH-approved filtering facepiece respirators**



**Centers for Disease Control  
and Prevention**  
National Institute for Occupational  
Safety and Health

## Information regarding damaged or degraded head straps on previously stockpiled NIOSH-approved filtering facepiece respirators

NIOSH is aware that many different NIOSH-approved filtering facepiece respirator (FFR) models were stockpiled for prolonged times and are now distributed for use during the COVID-19 response. These FFRs are made using different materials (e.g., filtering media and strap material), which may age or degrade over time and become damaged. Generally, FFRs are not designed for long-term storage, and many models may have shelf lives designated by the NIOSH approval holder. The shelf life information is generally found on the packaging or the approval holder's website.

**Recently, NIOSH received multiple inquiries concerning the identification and replacement of damaged straps on large caches of NIOSH-approved N95 FFRs that have since passed their designated shelf life.**

Users should perform a visual inspection of each respirator prior to donning per the user instructions. Additional questions and concerns related to the condition of the respirator should be directed to the approval holder.

**Modifications to NIOSH-approved respirators should not be made as part of conventional operations.** In accordance with the NIOSH regulation, [42 CFR Part 84, Approval of Respiratory Protective Devices](#), **any changes that modify the design (e.g., replacing damaged straps), as approved by NIOSH, voids the NIOSH approval.** In this case, adding new straps may affect the fit or filtration performance of the respirator with potential to negatively impact the respiratory protection provided to the user.

**Only as a contingency or crisis capacity strategy option when no respirators are left** other than those with damaged straps, consideration can be given to replacing the damaged straps and using these modified "respirators" as facemasks (i.e., NOT as a NIOSH-approved N95 FFR). The [CDC crisis capacity recommendations](#) for prioritizing the use of respirators vs. facemasks by activity type should be followed.

### Supplemental Information

CDC NIOSH posted guidance on [Stockpiled N95 Respirators](#) on March 6, 2020. As of March 28<sup>th</sup> 2020, the [FDA's emergency use authorization \(EUA\)](#) allows the use of NIOSH-approved FFR models in healthcare settings that have since passed the manufacturer's recommended shelf-life; however, if the product exhibits signs of damage, it should be discarded. The [FDA Emergency Use Authorizations website](#) should be checked for the most up-to-date information.

Users can find information about stockpiled FFRs tested in NIOSH's research study on [NIOSH's website](#). Each FFR tested was visually inspected, where damage was [observed](#) for a number of straps for two particular models. All tested units with a designated shelf life were past the shelf life identified.