



Nuisance Dust Masks

Comfort masks vs. Respirators

Comfort masks, also called hygiene masks or nuisance dust masks, were till now allowed on the market without a CE-mark. The Commission, in co-operation with the member states and all parties concerned, has decided that a clear distinction should be made between masks that are intended to protect the wearer and those that are intended to prevent the wearer from polluting the environment.

Masks intended to protect the wearer

There are masks that are being designed to protect the wearer against airborne contaminant such as:

- Dust (e.g. powders, metal and wood dust, flour etc.)
- Mists (from spraying applications, pickling baths etc.)
- Fumes (like metal fumes in foundries, welding applications)
- Gases and vapours (from solvents and other volatile chemicals)
- Pollen, bacteria and other biological hazards

For such applications you should be wearing masks that are respiratory protective devices. They have been designed as to ensure a tight fit on the face and contain specific types of filtering and absorbing materials. They are tested against harmonised standards and ensure a well-defined level of protection. They are covered by the PPE directive 89/686/EEC and are CE marked accordingly.

Masks intended to prevent pollution of the environment

Other masks are designed only to prevent the pollution of the environment from the wearer. This so-called environment could be the workplace, the products being manipulated or patients being taken care of. Typical applications are:

- clean rooms
- assembling facilities for electronic or other high tech components, food industry and pharmaceutical industry (where contamination of the pharmaceuticals should be prevented)
- operating rooms in hospitals (surgical masks)

The absence of CE marks and unclear instructions have lead to a lot of confusion. Additional measures will now be taken to clarify the situation.

Additional warnings

Masks intended not to pollute the environment may not bear the CE logo and will have to make it clear that they do not perform any respiratory protection function. You should be able to find the following kind of warnings back on the packaging or instruction leaflets of the masks:

- either that the protection of the wearer of this mask is in no way guaranteed
- or that wearing this mask does not guarantee wearer protection
- In case of the surgical masks that are CE marked as a medical device, the mark only indicates compliance with the medical devices directive 93/42/EEC but no protection of the wearer is guaranteed.

Transition period

As this decision has been taken only quite recently, the changes on the products are still in a transition period. Manufacturers are now in the process of changing the markings and the warnings according to this new situation. The distribution chains will gradually be offering the products with the new packaging. The industry will do the necessary to help their customers to understand this new situation.

Instructions for use

You can state that in general, and in this more specific case, the instructions for use are a very important tool for the end-users to understand the correct use of masks. You should be able to understand from these, whether the mask that you plan to use is intended to protect you as the wearer or not. There is of course a lot more useful information that you can find in instruction for use... never forget to read them before you start using a mask!



3M Occupational Health and
Environmental Safety EMEA Division
3M Centre, Cain Road
Bracknell
Berkshire, RG12 8HT
www.3m.eu/occsafety