VCSU SAFE OPERATING PROCEDURES:
Respiratory Protection

The basic purpose of any respirator is to protect the user from specific inhalation hazards. Respirators provide protection by removing contaminants from the air before inhalation or by supplying an independent source of clean air.

Respirators are an effective method of protection against designated hazards when properly selected and worn. Respirator use is encouraged, even when exposures are below the exposure limit, to provide an additional level of comfort and protection for workers. However, if a respirator is used improperly or not kept clean, the respirator itself can become a hazard to the worker. Sometimes, workers may wear respirators to avoid exposures to hazards, even if the amount of hazardous substance does not exceed the limits set by OSHA standards. If your employer provides respirators for your voluntary use, or if you provide your own respirator, you need to take certain precautions to be sure that the respirator itself does not present a hazard. You should do the following:

- Read and heed all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirator's limitations.
- Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern.
- Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against. For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors, or very small solid particles of fumes or smoke.
- Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.
- **Note - having facial hair does not promote a proper seal for respiratory equipment.

Employees who voluntarily use respiratory protective equipment are those who wish to use a respirator on the job even though it is not required by the employer or regulation. Filtering face-piece respirators (e.g., disposable dust masks) are often used to provide relief from nuisance levels of dusts and mists. They cannot be used for protection against fumes, vapors, gases, asbestos, sandblasting or paint sprays. If employees elect to voluntarily use disposable respirators, and if there are no identified inhalation hazards, disposable masks may be provided without medical certification or fit-testing.