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GUIDANCE FOR HVAC FILTER REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL

INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn when conducting tasks such as heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) filter removal and disposal. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not provide specific guidance on the PPE required for HVAC filter removal and disposal activities. This U.S. Army Public Health Center guidance is based on the most current information from the Epidemic Task Force of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE).

PPE for HVAC Filter Tasks

The following PPE should be worn when performing maintenance on any HVAC system with the potential for viral contamination:

- A properly-fitted respirator (N-95 or higher¹)²
- Eye protection (safety glasses, goggles, or face shield)
- Disposable Gloves (vinyl, rubber, or nitrile)

The following PPE can be worn to increase overall protection:

- Disposable coveralls, gowns, and/or shoe covers

NOTE: Hand washing (proper techniques for a minimum of 20 seconds) MUST be performed after removal of PPE. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES FOR HVAC FILTER REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL

During the COVID-19 response, it is not necessary to suspend HVAC system maintenance, including filter changes. With many unknowns regarding the health status

¹For High-efficiency particulate air [HEPA] filtration a more protective respirator may be required.

²Ensure compliance with the Installation Respiratory Protection Program and any Military Treatment Facility's Infection Control Program.

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of personnel in the building and professional guidance changing frequently, additional safety precautions are warranted.

Efforts should be made to reduce creating any unnecessary dust while changing filters. Do not shake, beat, or drop the filters. If this is a concern, use a fixate, such as hairspray, on the filters before removal.

When feasible, filters can be disinfected with a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency N-List approved disinfectant before removal. Keep the surface wet for a period of time according to the label of the product used.

Once removed, filters should immediately be sealed in a plastic bag so as to not track any material through the buildings and increase the potential for exposures. Used gloves and disposable coveralls should also be placed in the sealed plastic bag. Dispose of the sealed plastic bag containing used filters and PPE into regular trash.

If possible, consider letting the filter load up further than usual to reduce frequency of filter changes. Ensure that the pressure drop does not increase enough to disrupt room pressure differentials and confirm filters remain snug in their frames.

REFERENCES

ASHRAE—Filtration/Disinfection:

<https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/filtration-disinfection>

What Aircraft Maintenance Workers Need to Know about COVID-19—Air Filter Replacement:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/aircraft-maintenance-workers.html>

List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2:

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>