



HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES FORCES KOREA  
UNIT #15237  
APO AP 96271-5237

USFK

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL USFK PERSONNEL

SUBJECT: United States Forces Korea Command Policy Letter #10 for Elective Use of Filtering Masks by Service Members in Uniform during Elevated Particulate Air Pollution Levels

1. References:

- a. USFK Policy 40-6, USFK Air Quality Policy, 22 June 2017.
- b. AR 385-10, The Army Safety Program, 24 February 2017.
- c. AFI 48-137, Respiratory Protection Program. 12 September 2018.
- d. COMPACFLT OPORD 201, 4 September 2007.
- e. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Air Quality Guide for Particle Pollution, August 2015.
- f. U.S. Army Public Health Center, 2018 Health of the Force Report, February 2019.

2. Applicability. This policy applies to all military personnel serving in USFK.

3. Purpose: To establish a unified USFK policy for the elective use of filtering masks by Service Members in uniform during elevated particulate matter (PM) air pollution events.

4. Background

a. From 2015-2017, air pollution levels near U.S. bases in the Republic of Korea (ROK) exceeded U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for poor air quality approximately 100 days each year. Depending on the season and environmental conditions, the dominant air pollutants in the ROK are 2.5 micron PM (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), 10 micron PM (PM<sub>10</sub>), and ozone (O<sub>3</sub>). Air pollution is reported as a standardized measurement known as the Air Quality Index (AQI). The published AQI measurement for any locality reflects the level of the dominant pollutant in that area. AQI in the ROK is often elevated in late Winter and early Spring due primarily to PM<sub>2.5</sub>.

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b. The EPA recommends personal awareness and behavior modification to decrease exposure to elevated PM levels. As outlined in Enclosure 1, the EPA identifies the following two methods as most effective for decreasing exposure to PM:

- (1) Limiting the duration of time spent outdoors.
- (2) Decreasing the intensity of outdoor activities.

Service members with heart or lung disease or diabetes (known as Sensitive Groups for AQI purposes) should modify outdoor activity when the AQI reaches Orange (101-150). The general public should modify outdoor activity when AQI reaches Red (151-200).

c. The EPA makes no recommendation regarding the elective wear of masks in elevated PM environments. When sized and worn according to manufacturer's guidelines, N95 equivalent masks may be effective at blocking up to 95% of PM<sub>2.5</sub> particles. When fitted improperly or worn without regard to manufacturer's recommendations, N95 masks likely provide suboptimal to little protection from PM. N95 masks are typically ineffective against the gaseous forms of air pollution such as ozone.

5. Policy. USFK Commands and Service Members will follow EPA recommendations for behavior modification in elevated AQI environments for non-mission critical activities as outlined in USFK Regulation 40-6. Military personnel are authorized to wear an approved particulate filtering disposable mask while outdoors in uniform when the AQI is reported as Orange (101-150) or higher for PM. This policy serves as an adjunct to behavior modification and to allow service members maximal control over their personal health and wellness. Elective wear of masks indoors is not authorized.

a. Official AQI Index Source. The World Air Quality Index Project website (<http://aqicn.org/map/southkorea/>) is the official index source for AQI for this policy. Military personnel may elect to wear masks when the AQI value in the vicinity closest to their location is Orange (101-150) or greater for PM.

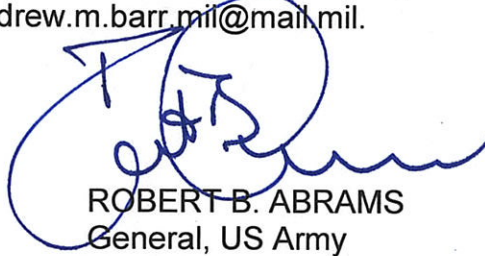
b. Authorized Masks. Masks approved by National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) with filtration ratings of N-95 or higher are authorized for elective wear in uniform. Masks certified by the Korean Ministry of Food and Drug Safety with filtration ratings of KF-94 or higher are also authorized. Masks must be solid black and must cover both mouth and nose at all times during wear, but may not cover ears or eyes. Military personnel electing to wear masks during elevated PM events must follow all manufacturer instructions for proper wear and maintenance of their masks. Masks must be removed when entering security checkpoints for identity verification purposes.

c. Medical Exceptions. Military personnel who experience significant symptoms in elevated AQI environments should seek evaluation by their medical provider.

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6. The point of contact for this memorandum is COL Andrew Barr, USFK Command Surgeon, at DSN 315-755-8445 or [andrew.m.barr.mil@mail.mil](mailto:andrew.m.barr.mil@mail.mil).



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Encl

1. EPA Recommendations

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### EPA Recommendations for Particle Pollution

Air Quality Index	Who Needs to be Concerned?	What Should I Do?
Good (0-50)		It's a great day to be active outside.
Moderate (51-100)	Some people who may be unusually sensitive to particle pollution.	<b>Unusually sensitive people:</b> Consider reducing prolonged or heavy exertion. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. These are signs to take it easier. <b>Everyone else:</b> It's a good day to be active outside.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101-150)	Sensitive groups include <b>people with heart or lung disease, older adults, children and teenagers.</b>	<b>Sensitive groups:</b> Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. It's OK to be active outside, but take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. <b>People with asthma</b> should follow their asthma action plans and keep quick relief medicine handy. <b>If you have heart disease:</b> Symptoms such as palpitations, shortness of breath, or unusual fatigue may indicate a serious problem. If you have any of these, contact your health care provider.
Unhealthy (151-200)	<b>Everyone</b>	<b>Sensitive groups:</b> Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling. <b>Everyone else:</b> Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. Take more breaks during outdoor activities.
Very Unhealthy (201-300)	<b>Everyone</b>	<b>Sensitive groups:</b> Avoid all physical activity outdoors. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when air quality is better. <b>Everyone else:</b> Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling to a time when air quality is better.
Hazardous (301-500)	<b>Everyone</b>	<b>Everyone:</b> Avoid all physical activity outdoors. <b>Sensitive groups:</b> Remain indoors and keep activity levels low. Follow tips for keeping particle levels low indoors.