



## REUSABLE RESPIRATORS TO PROTECT WORKERS AT RISK DURING EMERGENCIES

### Reusable respirators are needed in the Strategic National Stockpile

Effective personal protective equipment (PPE) that is rapidly available to first responders and healthcare workers during biological emergencies ensures their protection and allows them to safely execute their critical societal functions during national crises.

The Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) exists to have emergency medical products on hand when a disaster occurs. Respirators are medical products that protect wearers, like first responders and healthcare workers, from hazards such as particulate matter, gases, and airborne diseases. The great majority of respirators purchased and stored in the SNS are foreign-made, single-use disposable masks. It can take months to ramp up supplies of single-use masks during an emergency. Increasing the supply of reusable respirators made in America is important so they can be integrated into a timely emergency response strategy and be available in the SNS to immediately distribute to states and local communities during active emergencies.

### Increasing the number of reusable respirators in the SNS would be cost effective and decrease reliance on a highly constrained global supply chain

Stockpiling the large quantity of disposable masks needed during potential emergencies is prohibitively expensive. If the US continues to rely on single-use masks, it will need to procure very high numbers during a crisis. A major problem with this strategy is that during emergencies, the entire world depends on the same limited foreign supply chains for mask manufacturing. The mask shortages that hampered the 2020 pandemic response would likely recur. Increasing the number of American-made reusable respirators in the SNS now would be prudent — one reusable respirator can replace hundreds of single use masks. Reusable respirators are a sustainable investment and less expensive in the long run than disposables.

In addition, reusable respirators have a better seal and offer more protection for wearers than disposable masks, which are often worn incorrectly. Research shows that healthcare workers in high-risk settings prefer reusable respirators. Reusable respirators are made by several US companies that are interested in working with the government to solve this challenge.

### Congress could act to provide appropriations for reusable respirators and to compel HHS to set appropriate procurement requirements to include them in the SNS

- Congress could appropriate enough annual funding for the SNS to procure and maintain a supply of reusable respirators for workers who are critical to emergency response.
- Congress can direct the SNS and the Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures Enterprise (PHEMCE) to issue a requirement for reusable respirators in the SNS.