

## Letter from the Americas Section Chair

Dear Members,

On October 30, 2019 we met in Pittsburgh, PA and celebrated 100 years of respiratory protection in the United States. On behalf of the Society, we welcomed our newest honorary member, Rich Metzler! We had a successful technical meeting with 85 attendees focused on a timely problem: consistent guidance needed for the general public during situations in which they need, or believe they need, respiratory protection. While we thoroughly respected the meeting's focus on public use, we had no idea how relevant it was or how quickly the respiratory protection needs of the world would exponentially increase in just a few short months.



It's challenging to know where to begin to tell the story about the ISRP Americas Section's response to COVID-19. We deeply respect the science and history behind the modern respiratory protection world. We are willing to work long hours to get respirators, information, and guidance to users, producers, and purchasers. We have focused efforts on healthcare workers, completing research to understand what they consider to be their unique respiratory protection needs. We have discussed the challenges in educating the public about respiratory protection (for example, selection, use and limitations, no one dons a respirator and becomes invincible) and in developing products to meet their needs, especially during times of crisis. We have supported efforts to develop harmonized, international standards for testing, selecting, using and evaluating respiratory protective devices. And now, the pandemic has brought these issues to the forefront and we are more concerned than ever that messages about, and standards for respiratory protection are confusing to many.

**Fundamentally, we want users to know that all respirators, filtering facepieces, half or full facepiece air-purifying respirators, powered air-purifying respirators, supplied air respirators, and self-contained breathing apparatus, are designed and manufactured to help protect the wearer!** In the Americas, respirators are marked as conforming to minimum performance standards, whether that be the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH, in the United States and Canada), the Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas (ABNT, Brazil), or the Norma Oficial Mexicana (NOM, Mexico). A mask - a medical mask, a procedural mask, or a homemade mask – is not designed to seal to the wearer's face and does not filter particles sufficiently to reduce inhalation hazards for the wearer, although they may capture some excretions and assist in infection control.

As the Chair of the Americas Section, I am proud of the work we are doing in response to this pandemic. Manufacturers are identifying new supply streams and developing respirator designs that are more efficiently produced and packaged. Regulators are working with respirator manufacturers to get new products to market as quickly as possible or to extend supplies. Researchers are exploring decontamination methods and testing methods to ensure efficacy

and protection during this unique time. The professional relationships and friendships we have built and will continue to build around this small, but amazingly committed community of respiratory protection is sustaining us. We are talking, emailing, texting, skyping and working together every day to get more approved respirators out to workers. We are responding to inquiries, posting guidance and information, informing our governmental leaders, and letting everyone we know, as much as they are willing to listen to and learn, about the importance of effective respiratory protection!

We are already thinking about the next steps, making mental notes about the lessons learned, and thinking about ways to collectively make a difference. Certainly, we need to refocus our efforts and improve our understanding of global standards and come together to create a harmonized standard for minimum particulate protection, N95 filtering facepieces and their counterparts. The pandemic is broadening our perspective about the need to discuss all personal protective equipment holistically, as forms of infection control, including respirators, masks, and eye protection, since each have their role in preventing transmission and infection, whether it be of the eyes or airways. The pandemic is broadening our profession as more people and products are needed to meet the world's respiratory protection needs. Technology and social media have changed the way people get and share information. The ISRP can grow with new perspectives, members, and ways to have impact, I hope. We are doing so much and have so much to do!

With my best regards,

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