



WORKING SAFELY WITH SILICA



What are the hazards of silica?

Crystalline silica is a basic component of soil, sand, granite, and many other minerals.

- Quartz is the most common form of crystalline silica.
- Silica dust is formed when workers chip, cut, drill, or grind objects that contain silica.
- Breathing silica dust can cause cancer and a disease called silicosis.
 - Silicosis develops when silica dust enters the lungs and causes the formation of scar tissue, which reduces the ability of the lungs to take in oxygen.
 - Since silicosis affects lung function, it makes people more susceptible to lung infections like tuberculosis.
 - Smoking adds to the damage caused by breathing silica dust.

Employees may be exposed to crystalline silica dust in many ways.

- Abrasive blasting is done to clean and smooth molds and castings, polish jewelry, finish tombstones, and etch or frost glass.
 - This process is also used to remove paint, oils, rust, or dirt from objects in order to treat or repaint them.
 - Employees who work with cement, brick, sheetrock, ceramic tile, and asphalt paving materials are also exposed.
- In addition, crystalline silica is used in manufacturing, in household abrasives, adhesives, paints, soaps, and glass.

Employers can protect their workers in many ways. They can:

- Be aware of the operations and jobs that create crystalline silica exposures.
- Replace crystalline silica materials with safer substitutes, whenever possible.
- Install local exhaust ventilation systems to reduce exposure.
- Follow work practice such as use of water sprays and vacuums to reduce and control dust exposures.
- They must provide protection with approved respirators, if necessary, to reduce worker exposure below the PEL level.



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As employees, you can also follow safe work practices to protect yourselves.

- Always use required respiratory protection.
 - Inspect your respirator carefully before each use and be sure that it fits tightly.
- Participate in all training and monitoring programs.
- Vacuum the dust from your clothes before you leave the work area.
- Wash work clothes separately from other household laundry or use disposable work clothes.
- Don't eat, drink, smoke, or apply cosmetics in areas where there is crystalline silica dust.
- Wash your hands before you do any of these activities elsewhere.
- Best advice—just don't smoke at all—it makes your risk of lung disease that much greater.

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