



Silicosis

Crystalline silica is a common mineral found in the earth's crust. Materials like sand, stone, concrete, and mortar contain crystalline silica. It is also used to make products such as glass, pottery, ceramics, bricks, and artificial stone.

Respirable crystalline silica – very small particles at least 100 times smaller than ordinary sand you might find on beaches and playgrounds – is created when cutting, sawing, grinding, drilling, and crushing stone, rock, concrete, brick, block, and mortar.

To protect workers exposed to respirable crystalline silica, OSHA has issued two respirable crystalline silica standards: one for construction, and the other for general industry and maritime.

Sources of Exposure

- Working with saltillo/ceramic roofing tiles
- Sandblasting for surface preparation (silica is used as an abrasive blasting agent)
- Crushing and drilling rock and concrete
- Masonry and concrete work, such as building and road construction and repair
- Mining/tunneling; demolition work
- Cement and asphalt pavement manufacturing

Long-term Effects of Silicosis

- Lung cancer
- Bronchitis/chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder
- Tuberculosis
- Scleroderma – a disease affecting skin, blood vessels, joints and skeletal muscles
- Possible renal disease

Symptoms of Silicosis

- Shortness of breath, possible fever
- Fatigue, loss of appetite
- Chest pain, dry, nonproductive cough
- Respiratory failure, which may eventually lead to death

Steps to Preventing Silicosis

- Use all available engineering controls such as blasting cabinets and local exhaust ventilation. Avoid using compressed air for cleaning surfaces.
- Use water sprays and wet methods for cutting, chipping, drilling, sawing and grinding.
- Substitute non-crystalline silica blasting material.
- Use respirators approved for protection against silica. If sandblasting, use abrasive blasting respirators.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke near crystalline silica dust, and always wash hands and face before eating, drinking or smoking away from exposure area.

Sources: OSHA Quick Card; National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

Safety tips developed based on generally accepted safety standards believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is for general guidance only and should not be relied upon for legal compliance purposes.

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