



OSHA Proposing to Adopt Stricter Silica Dust Exposure Limits and Work Practice Standards

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On August 23, 2013, **OSHA issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking** designed to reduce the permissible exposure limit (PEL) associated with silica dust exposure. OSHA is proposing a new PEL for respirable crystalline silica (quartz, cristobalite, and tridymite) of 50 µg/m³ in the general industry, construction, and shipyard sectors, a standard anywhere from two to five times more stringent than current PELs that date back to 1971.

According to **OSHA's Fact Sheet**, "about 2.2 million workers are exposed to respirable crystalline silica in their workplaces. The majority of these workers, about 1.85 million, are in the construction industry. Exposures occur when workers cut, grind, crush, or drill silica-containing materials such as concrete, masonry, tile, and rock. About 320,000 workers are exposed in general industry operations such as brick, concrete, and pottery manufacturing, as well as operations using sand products, such as foundry work and hydraulic fracturing (fracking) of oil and gas wells. Workers are also exposed during sandblasting in general industry and maritime workplaces."

OSHA has prepared a separate **Construction Industry Fact Sheet** stating that employers in the construction industry will be required to:

- "Measure the amount of silica that workers are exposed to if it may be at or above an action level of 25 µg/m³ (micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air), averaged over an 8-hour day;
- Protect workers from respirable crystalline silica exposures above the PEL of 50 µg/m³, averaged over an 8-hour day;
- Limit workers' access to areas where they could be exposed above the PEL;
- Use dust controls to protect workers from silica exposures above the PEL;
- Provide respirators to workers when dust controls cannot limit exposures to the PEL;
- Offer medical exams-including chest X-rays and lung function tests-every three years for workers exposed above the PEL for 30 or more days per year;
- Train workers on work operations that result in silica exposure and ways to limit exposure; and
- Keep records of workers' silica exposure and medical exams."

Additional information on the proposed silica dust exposure rulemaking is found on OSHA's **Crystalline Silica Rulemaking website**.