

OSHA's Crystalline Silica Rule: Construction

OSHA is issuing two standards to protect workers from exposure to respirable crystalline silica—one for construction, and the other for general industry and maritime—in order to allow employers to tailor solutions to the specific conditions in their workplaces.

Who is affected by the construction standard?

About two million construction workers are exposed to respirable crystalline silica in over 600,000 workplaces. OSHA estimates that more than 840,000 of these workers are exposed to silica levels that exceed the new permissible exposure limit (PEL).

Exposure to respirable crystalline silica can cause silicosis, lung cancer, other respiratory diseases, and kidney disease. Exposure can occur during common construction tasks such as using masonry saws, grinders, drills, jackhammers and handheld powered chipping tools; operating vehicle-mounted drilling rigs; milling; operating crushing machines; and using heavy equipment for demolition or certain other tasks.



Photo: NIOSH

Without dust controls, using a handheld power saw to cut concrete can expose workers to high levels of respirable crystalline silica.

The construction standard does not apply where exposures will remain low under any foreseeable conditions; for example, when only performing tasks such as mixing mortar; pouring concrete footers, slab foundation and foundation walls; and removing concrete formwork.

What does the standard require?

The standard requires employers to limit worker exposures to respirable crystalline silica and to take other steps to protect workers.

The standard provides flexible alternatives, especially useful for small employers. Employers can either use a control method laid out in [Table 1*](#) of the construction standard, or they can measure workers' exposure to silica and independently decide which dust controls work best to limit exposures to the PEL in their workplaces.

Regardless of which exposure control method is used, all construction employers covered by the standard are required to:

- Establish and implement a **written exposure control plan** that identifies tasks that involve exposure and methods used to protect workers, including procedures to restrict access to work areas where high exposures may occur.
- Designate a **competent** person to implement the written exposure control plan.
- Restrict **housekeeping** practices that expose workers to silica where feasible alternatives are available.
- Offer **medical exams**—including chest X-rays and lung function tests—every three years for workers who are required by the standard to wear a respirator for 30 or more days per year.

- **Train workers** on work operations that result in silica exposure and ways to limit exposure.
- **Keep records** of workers' silica exposure and medical exams.

What is Table 1?

Table 1 matches common construction tasks with dust control methods, so employers know exactly what they need to do to limit worker exposures to silica. The dust control measures listed in the table include methods known to be effective, like using water to keep dust from getting into the air or using ventilation to capture dust. In some operations, respirators may also be needed.

Employers who follow Table 1 correctly are not required to measure workers' exposure to silica and are not subject to the PEL.

Table 1 Example: Handheld Power Saws

If workers are sawing silica-containing materials, they can use a saw with a built-in system that applies water to the saw blade. The water limits the amount of respirable crystalline silica that gets into the air.

| Table 1: Specified Exposure Control Methods When Working with Materials Containing Crystalline Silica | | | |
|---|---|--|----------------|
| Equipment/ Task | Engineering and Work Practice Control Methods | Required Respiratory Protection and Minimum Assigned Protection Factor (APF) | |
| | | ≤ 4 hrs/ shift | > 4 hrs/ shift |
| (ii) Handheld power saws (any blade diameter) | Use saw equipped with integrated water delivery system that continuously feeds water to the blade. Operate and maintain tool in accordance with manufacturer's instructions to minimize dust emissions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When used outdoors. • When used indoors or in an enclosed area. | None | APF 10 |
| | | APF 10 | APF 10 |

Excerpt from Table 1.

*See regulatory text for construction standard, with complete Table 1 at www.osha.gov/silica/SilicaConstructionRegText.pdf.

In this example, if a worker uses the saw outdoors for four hours or less per day, no respirator would be needed. If a worker uses the saw for more than four hours per day or any time indoors, he or she would need to use a respirator with an assigned protection factor (APF) of at least 10. In this case, a NIOSH-certified filtering facepiece respirator that covers the nose and mouth (sometimes referred to as a dust mask) could be used. If a worker needs to use a respirator on 30 or more days a year, he or she would need to be offered a medical exam.

Alternative exposure control methods

Employers who do not use control methods in Table 1 must:

- 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 eight-hour day.
- Protect workers from respirable crystalline silica exposures above the **permissible exposure limit of 50 µg/m³**, averaged over an eight-hour day.
- 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.

When are employers required to comply with the standard?

Construction employers must comply with all requirements of the standard by June 23, 2017, except requirements for laboratory evaluation of exposure samples, which begin on June 23, 2018.

Additional information

Additional information on OSHA's silica rule can be found at www.osha.gov/silica.

OSHA can provide extensive help through a variety of programs, including technical assistance about effective safety and health programs, workplace consultations, and training and education.

OSHA's On-site Consultation Program offers free and confidential occupational safety and health services to small and medium-sized businesses in all states and several territories across the country, with priority given to high-hazard worksites. On-site consultation services are separate from enforcement and do not result in penalties or citations. Consultants from state agencies or universities work with employers to identify

workplace hazards, provide advice on compliance with OSHA standards, and assist in establishing and improving safety and health management systems. To locate the OSHA On-site Consultation Program nearest you, call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) or visit www.osha.gov/dcsp/smallbusiness.

For more information on this and other health-related issues impacting workers, to report an emergency, fatality, inpatient hospitalization, or to file a confidential complaint, contact your nearest OSHA office, visit www.osha.gov, or call OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), TTY 1-877-889-5627.

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For assistance, contact us. We can help. It's confidential.



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