

Complying With OSHA Silica Safety Guidelines



Your plan for awareness, protection & compliance with OSHA guidelines

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Construction workers are at risk for exposure to silica, which can cause respiratory injuries in its crystallized form. Respirable crystalline silica particles are created when cutting, grinding, drilling and crushing silica-containing materials.

This includes stone, rock, concrete, brick, block and mortar. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), more than 2.3 million workers in the United States are exposed to crystalline silica dust — 90% of which are employed in construction. Inhaling silica particles can increase the risk of silicosis, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and kidney disease.

A new standard for construction silica regulation — US OSHA 29 CFR 1926.1153 — requires contractors to control employees' exposure to respirable crystalline silica to help protect them from these worksite hazards.

OSHA has also published support documents for the regulation that should be reviewed to ensure that your business is in compliance with the newly reduced permissible exposure limit, guidelines for a written exposure control plan, medical surveillance and a requirement for a silica-competent person on staff.

Permissible Exposure Limit

OSHA CFR 1926.1153 has a reduced permissible exposure limit (PEL) for construction silica than previous rules. The PEL is 80% lower than it used to be and, due to these new regulations, more construction workers are required to wear respiratory protection at work.

Referencing OSHA's "Specified Exposure Control Methods When Working With Materials Containing Crystalline Silica" table will help you identify common construction tasks that could pose respired silica risks.

Each task on the table has its own risks for which appropriate and effective engineering controls, work practices and respiratory personal protective equipment (PPE) are specified.

Worksite Safety Plan

Writing down your worksite safety plan means being able to follow it and keep the guidelines uniform. Your written exposure control plan will describe the methods you're using to control workplace exposures, which will include engineering controls, work practices and any housekeeping measures. You'll also need to include descriptions of the silica-related tasks and plans to restrict work area access for nonauthorized personnel. Review your plans annually for effectiveness and update them as needed.

As part of the plan's implementation, a designated silica-competent person should regularly and frequently inspect the jobsite, materials and equipment.

Medical Surveillance

Employers are responsible for making sure that medical surveillance is available. Surveillance must be available at no cost and within a reasonable timeframe and place for each worker that's required to wear PPE for respirable silica exposure. After an initial baseline examination is done, information will need to be

provided to a physician or other licensed health care professional. That professional will need to create a written medical report for the employee and a written medical opinion for the employer.

Silica-Competent Person

You must have a trained silica-competent person able to identify existing and potential respirable crystalline silica hazards in your workplace, and they will also have the authority to take corrective measures to eliminate or minimize the problem. There are construction silica-competent person courses available to help train these individuals.

Final Checklist

- Use this list to ensure you comply with the new construction silica regulation:
- Identify and train a silica-competent person.
- Decide if OSHA's "Specified Exposure Control Methods When Working with Materials Containing Crystalline Silica" table can be used to identify your PEL.
- Develop your written exposure control plan and implement it once it's finalized.
- Conduct frequent and regular inspections of your jobsite to make sure your plan is working.
- If a situation is complex, bring in qualified persons to support your silica-competent person.
- Review your plan once your project has ended.

This list is a brief overview of compliance. If you are an employer who is responsible for silica work, you should familiarize yourself with all U.S. OSHA silica compliance standards, guidelines and directives prior to beginning any silica-related work.

Rick Pedley, PK Safety's president and CEO, joined the family business in 1979. PK Safety, a supplier of occupational safety and personal protective equipment and manufacturer of its own new FR line Grit has been operating since 1947 and takes OSHA, ANSI, PPE and CSA work safety equipment seriously. Visit pksafety.com.
