

Silicosis Prevention

What is Silicosis?

Silicosis is a disabling, nonreversible, and sometimes fatal lung disease caused by overexposure to respirable crystalline silica. Overexposure to dust that contains microscopic particles of crystalline silica can cause scar tissue to form in the lungs, which reduces their ability to extract oxygen from the air we breathe. Typical sand found at the beach does not pose a silicosis threat. Each year, more than 250 American workers die with silicosis. There is no cure for the disease, but it is 100 percent preventable if employers, workers, and health professionals work together to reduce exposures.

What Can You Do to Prevent Silicosis?

- Work with your employer to prevent silicosis at your worksite.
- Use engineering controls installed by your employer to reduce silica dust levels, and make sure they are properly maintained. Tell your employer when they aren't working properly.
- Minimize dust by following good work practices, such as removing dust with a water hose or vacuum with a high-efficiency particulate filter rather than blowing it clean with compressed air, or by wet sweeping instead of dry sweeping.
- Suggest to your employer to substitute less hazardous materials than crystalline silica for abrasive blasting.
- Wear, maintain, and correctly use approved particulate respirators when engineering controls alone are not adequate to reduce exposures below permissible levels. Beards and mustaches interfere with the respirator seal to the face, making most respirators ineffective.
- If you must sandblast, use type CE positive pressure abrasive blasting respirators.
- Participate in air monitoring, medical surveillance, and training programs offered by your employer or when required by law.
- Talk to your employer, employee representative, or union if you are concerned about the dust in your workplace. Ask for the results of air sampling done at your worksite.
- As a reminder, whenever you work with toxic materials, it is always a sound practice to:
 - Change into disposable or washable work clothes at your worksite, if possible; shower, where available; and change into clean clothing before leaving your worksite.
 - Avoid eating, drinking, or using tobacco products in work areas where there is dust or other toxic materials.
 - Wash your hands and face before eating or drinking.

**It cannot be said too often, or with too much emphasis:
Protecting the workplace and employees
from respirable crystalline silica – and eventually silicosis –
should be one of the most important objectives of every company
in the natural stone industry.**