

WHAT WORKERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE DANGERS OF SILICA DUST

WHAT IS SILICA?

Silica is a mineral found in sand, cement, block, stone, brick and mortar, and other materials. When a material containing silica is cut, drilled, chipped, sanded, or ground, the tiny silica particles enter the air as silica dust. Artificial (or engineered) stone countertops are commonly made of quartz. Dust from quartz releases very high levels of silica when it is worked on.

WHAT IS SILICOSIS AND WHO IS AT RISK?

Workers that cut artificial (or engineered) stone countertops are at highest risk for developing silicosis, which is a lung disease caused by breathing silica dust. Exposure to silica dust can lead to trouble breathing, permanent disability, and death. Chronic silicosis can develop after years of exposure to silica dust, even if the dust level is low. Exposure to high levels of silica dust can cause faster development of this disease. There is no cure for silicosis. Exposure to silica dust at work also increases the risk of lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and kidney disease.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SILICOSIS?

Silica dust can build up in the lungs and cause damage. Silicosis causes shortness of breath, persistent cough, fatigue, unintentional weight loss, and other symptoms that can be mistaken for a cold, flu, asthma, or COVID-19. The first signs of this disease are usually not obvious, and you may not notice any problems until years later. Even if you are no longer exposed to silica dust, the symptoms of silicosis can continue to progress and worsen in your body.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REDUCE THE RISK OF GETTING SILICOSIS?

- **Wear a NIOSH¹ approved respirator** that properly covers your mouth and nose, with tight-fitting goggles/glasses to cover your eyes, and a cover for your clothes that you can wash or throw away at the end of your shift. Masks with filters can be found in hardware stores starting at \$30-60.
- **Use a wet saw and a saw enclosure** when cutting stone to lower the amount of silica dust released into the air. Wet saws can be found at hardware stores starting at \$150-300.
- **Contain dust by wetting surfaces before sweeping.** Vacuum systems with HEPA filters can also help capture indoor silica dust. Vacuums can be found at hardware stores starting at \$100-300.
- **Talk to your employer about the risk of silica dust and ways to protect everyone at work.**



WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS OF SILICOSIS?

If you think you or someone you know has symptoms of silicosis, call and make an appointment with your doctor as soon as possible. Explain that you work with materials that contain silica and are exposed to silica dust. A doctor can evaluate you to determine what may be causing your symptoms. If you need help finding a medical provider, call 211. Starting in January 2024, full scope Medi-Cal coverage will be extended to people ages 26-49, regardless of immigration status. It is currently available for people over 50 years of age.

📞 Call 211

🌐 Visit 211LA.org

1 To learn which respirators are approved by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) visit www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp_part/

08/04/2023 - Dangers of Silica Dust Flyer (english)



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