

# What Workers Need to Know About The Dangers of Silica Dust & Silicosis prevention

## WHAT IS RESPIRABLE CRYSTALLINE SILICA(RCS)?

Silica is a natural mineral found in quarts, granite, marble, stone, sand, cement, blocks, stone, brick, and other building materials. When a material containing silica is cut, drilled, chipped, sanded, or grinded, the dust produced that enters the air contains tiny silica particles, smaller than a grain of sand, that are called Respirable Crystalline Silica. These tiny silica particles are also known as silica dust. Artificial stone, commonly made of crushed quartz and adhesives, can contain 93% or more silica dust, which is an extremely high level. Additionally, natural stones that contain more than 10% silica dust can also pose a threat to human health.

## WHAT IS SILICOSIS AND WHO IS AT RISK?

California is experiencing a silicosis epidemic and stone fabrication workers who cut artificial stone countertops are at greatest risk of developing silicosis, which is an incurable lung disease caused by breathing in silica dust. Exposure to silica dust over an extended period, even at low levels, can lead to the development of silicosis. High levels of silica dust can accelerate its development. Being exposed to silica dust can also cause difficulty breathing, permanent disability, and death. It also increases the risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), kidney diseases, and lung cancer. Silica dust is a class 1 carcinogen, which is known to cause cancer and other health problems in humans.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SILICOSIS?

Inhaling silica dust can damage the lungs and cause silicosis. Silicosis symptoms such as shortness of breath, cough, fatigue, unintentional weight loss, among other symptoms may resemble those of a cold, flu, asthma, or COVID-19. Symptoms may not occur until years after exposure to silica dust, and even if you are no longer exposed to silica dust, silicosis can continue to progress and may worsen over time.

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

**REVIEW CALIFORNIA'S DIVISION OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH'S (CAL/OSHA) EMERGENCY TEMPORARY STANDARD(ETS) ON RCS. THE ETS LEGALLY MANDATES PROTECTIVE MEASURES THAT EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS IN CALIFORNIA MUST TAKE TO REDUCE SILICA DUST EXPOSURE TO PREVENT SILICOSIS.**

**DO NOT DRY CUT!** Always use a wet saw with a cover and other wet methods when cutting countertop stones to reduce the amount of dust. Wet saws can be found in stores from \$150-300.

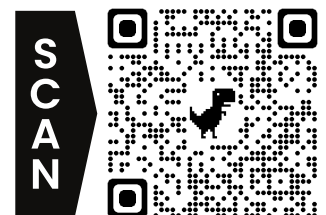
**WEAR RESPIRATORY PROTECTION!** Cal/OSHA requires the use of NIOSH-approved respirators, such as a tight-fitting Powered Air-Purifying Respirators(PAPR) or a respirator that provides equal or better protection, when doing tasks with high silica dust exposure. Purchase a respirator at an industrial and workplace safety store.

**ALWAYS CLEAN USING WATER!** Cal/OSHA prohibits compressed air pressure or dry sweeping, instead, use wet sweeping and vacuums with HEPA filters to prevent silica dust from getting back into the air.



## WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS OF SILICOSIS?

If you think you or someone you know has symptoms of silicosis, make an appointment with a medical provider, let them know you work with materials that expose you to silica dust and get evaluated as soon as possible. Workers whose jobs expose them to high levels of silica dust must be offered a medical exam through their employer. If you need help finding a medical provider, call 211 or visit 211LA.org . As of 2024, full scope Medi-Cal coverage has been expanded, it now covers qualifying people of all ages regardless of immigration status.



 Visit: [HTTP://PH.LACOUNTY.GOV/SILICOSIS](http://PH.LACOUNTY.GOV/SILICOSIS)  
02/23/2024 -Dangers of Silica Dust Flyer (english)

