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October 29, 2025

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Barbara Ferrer, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed.  
Director 

SUBJECT: **SILICOSIS PREVENTION EDUCATION  
(ITEM 24, BOARD AGENDA OF DECEMBER 19, 2023)**

This is in response to the Board of Supervisors’ December 19, 2023, motion in which the Board approved a budget appropriation adjustment for \$500,000 to the Department of Public Health (Public Health) and delegated authority to the Department to execute agreements to provide silicosis outreach and education in the San Fernando Valley and throughout the County [Directives 1 and 2] and directed Public Health to: 1) continue collaboration with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) by participating in the Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) process to improve workplace safety standards on silica and enhance business outreach, and 2) continue engaging stone fabrication businesses on the Cal/OSHA list and fabrication shops identified through outreach and share knowledge with Cal/OSHA [Directive 3]. The Board also directed the Department of Mental Health (DMH) in collaboration with Public Health, the Department of Health Services (DHS) and others as needed to develop and/or use existing resources and support materials in English and Spanish, to be made available for individuals diagnosed with silicosis and their families, including exploring opportunities to use the Mental Health Outpatient Clinic located on the Olive View-UCLA Medical Center (Olive View) campus to provide mental health support [Directive 4].

The Board directed the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to convene stakeholder representatives to discuss and coordinate additional outreach strategies to stone fabrication businesses and provide small business resources, as well as learn about what barriers exist that are preventing compliance with required safety protocols and use of personal protective equipment [Directive 5]. The Board also directed the Chief Executive Office (CEO) Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations unit (LAIR), in collaboration with other Departments, to continue to advocate in support of proposals that strengthen regulatory standards and enhance resources for education and the enforcement of regulations on silica dust to ensure better compliance [Directive 6]. Finally, the Board directed Public Health in collaboration with relevant Departments to continue engaging with stakeholders and report back on these directives in 60 days and quarterly thereafter [Directive 7]. This report covers the period from January through October 2025 (unless

otherwise noted) and includes updates from Public Health, as well as the other departments referenced in the Board motion.

### **Introduction**

Engineered stone-associated (ES) silicosis is a rapidly progressive interstitial lung disease that can cause respiratory insufficiency and death.<sup>1</sup> Case rates in California have been increasing each month with the majority being among workers that cut and fabricate ES in Los Angeles County. High-resolution computed tomography (HRCT) is considered the gold-standard for silicosis detection among patients with early-stage symptoms. Symptoms (persistent cough, exertional dyspnea, fatigue) are often mild, leading to delayed care unless clinicians elicit a detailed occupational history. Other tests used to identify silicosis include pulmonary function tests, standard radiographs, and blood samples.

As of October 23, 2025, the California Department of Public Health-Occupational Health Branch (CDPH-OHB) has confirmed 422 silicosis cases among workers that fabricate engineered stone; 218 in Los Angeles County. Silicosis cases in Los Angeles County have doubled over the past 12 months. Across the state, 47 lung transplants, and 23 deaths associated with silicosis have been recorded since CDPH's surveillance began in 2019. Case counts are widely regarded by physicians and occupational health subject matter experts as substantially undercounted due to lack of systematic reporting.

Additionally, federal funding cuts are impacting workers' ability to access necessary medical care. Many NIOSH programs were eliminated as of April 1, 2025, and the director of the California Labor Laboratory informed investigators of the California Artificial Stone and Silicosis Project (CASS) that funding had been retroactively terminated for all projects, including CASS, effective immediately. As a result of these cuts, the CASS Project, which includes the medical screening study at Olive View, will end one year early, before completing recruitment. This loss leaves at-risk stone fabricators and workers with no access to free silicosis screening anywhere in Los Angeles, making it much more difficult for them to receive a diagnosis and consider better-informed choices that impact their long-term health.

Case counts continued to rise each month due in part to new patient referrals that came in through the CASS project. Program staff estimate that approximately 30-40% of the 62 workers who have completed screening through the now-defunded CASS study were the direct result of outreach efforts from the contracted community-based organizations (CBO) working with Public Health's Office of Worker Health and Safety (OWHS) over the past two years, Pacoima Beautiful, and Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA).

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<sup>1</sup> León-Jiménez, A., Rodríguez-Rubio Corona, J., Jiménez-Gómez, G. *et al.* High metabolic activity in positron emission tomography and systemic inflammation occurring years after exposure cessation in engineered stone silicosis. *Sci Rep* **15**, 25364 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-10562-5>

While significant progress has been made to reach impacted communities, worker hubs, and stone fabrication shops with education and information related to silicosis prevention, the continued lack of resources dedicated to free or low-cost health screening for this at-risk population has presented challenges in sustaining relationships with workers in the industry and disease prevention. Outreach staff have noted concerns about sharing information on this deadly disease with stone fabricators without simultaneously offering a pathway for them to get screened and find out if they have silicosis. Public Health recommends identifying tangible resources, such as health screenings, for at-risk and eligible stone fabrication workers otherwise unable to afford screening on their own, and for workers who are not offered required medical screening through their employer as mandated under Cal/OSHA regulations.

### **Directive 3**

#### *Collaboration with Cal/OSHA and CDPH*

OWHS maintains regular communication with Cal/OSHA and CDPH-OHB staff and has added their engineered stone case dashboard to Public Health's silicosis website. OWHS continues to host monthly meetings to facilitate collaboration and open communication among all government, academic, and community-based organizations engaged with silicosis prevention. These meetings provide an ongoing opportunity for partners to share resources, discuss challenges, brainstorm solutions, and coordinate activities among various stakeholders actively responding to silicosis throughout the state and the nation.

OWHS is planning a partnership with CDPH-OHB to develop social media and other messaging materials geared to architects, interior designers, and builders to address the silicosis epidemic among engineered stone fabricators. This engagement will help industry professionals better understand the potential impacts design decisions involving engineered stone can have on workers and the industry and identify safer design options. Through this ongoing engagement, OWHS also intends to provide education and information about Cal/OSHA's silica standard for businesses that fabricate engineered stone slabs.

Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (DPW) has developed a silicosis handout (in English and Spanish) that is automatically attached as a separate document to accompany permits when issued, as well as an email/alert/notification to be sent to the contacts linked to permit cases to ensure the applicant is aware of the Silicosis notice. Public Health's OWHS supported and supplied DPW with the most current FAQs and information for this effort.

#### *Engagement with Stone Fabricator Businesses*

From May 2024 through June 2025, OWHS provided support to IDPESCA and Pacoima Beautiful, the two contracted CBOs conducting silicosis prevention outreach and education. During the contract period, OWHS staff met with the CBOs bi-weekly and as needed to provide real-time training and assistance troubleshooting immediate issues in the field, including providing in-

person training, material support for listening sessions and on-site worker training sessions, personal protective equipment (PPE), printed materials, and other resources for the contract CBOs. In addition, OWHS received monthly progress reports from the CBOs to communicate challenges or outreach strategies that were particularly fruitful. During the contract period of June 1, 2024, through May 31, 2025, IDEPSCA and Pacoima Beautiful achieved the following outreach totals:

Total shops visited: **476**  
Total workers reached: **1,260**  
Total community sites visited: **386**  
Total community members reached: **1,649**  
Number of presentations: **22**

The final contract deliverable for both IDEPSCA and Pacoima Beautiful, along with the program's fiscal intermediary, Liberty Hill Foundation, is to submit final reports and recommendations that will be available to your Board and other County or elected leaders by the end of the year. It is important to note that federal immigration enforcement activity significantly impacted the partner organizations and ability to do engagement and outreach.,

#### **Directive 4**

The Department of Mental Health (DMH) continues to be an active partner in overall response efforts having established a workflow for pulmonary specialists from Olive View to link patients to mental health services. DMH is also disseminating available silicosis resources to clients at five DMH-operated clinics and Peer Resource Centers (PRC). In March 2025, the DMH Service Area 2 Chief participated in a Spanish language interview with Enrique Chiabra of Telemundo 52 focused on the mental health impact of individuals diagnosed with Silicosis (["Te quedan dos años de vida": hombre narra como la silicosis afectó su salud mental – Telemundo 52](#)).

DHS Olive View leadership and pulmonologists have met with OWHS staff to discuss possible next steps to secure philanthropic funding to support health screening resources for stone fabrication workers who are being denied health screenings from their employers. This conversation is ongoing, and the two agencies will be reconvening soon to further discuss this strategy.

#### **Directive 5**

The Board instructed DEO to convene representatives from DPH, Pacoima Beautiful, the Western States Regional Council of Carpenters, the Los Angeles/Orange County Building and Construction Trade Council, local LA County America's Job Centers of California (AJCCs), industry trade groups and other relevant stakeholders to discuss and coordinate outreach strategies to stone fabrication businesses, provide small business resources broadly, and learn about what barriers exist that are preventing compliance with safety protocols and, in particular, the use of personal

protective equipment. The following provides an update on activities carried out since the previous update from February 2025:

1. **Monthly Partner Meetings:** DEO participated in monthly regional partner meetings with the stakeholders listed above to align outreach strategies, identify compliance barriers, and educate both employers and employees on silica safety standards.
2. **Webinars and Workshops:** DEO and Public Health continued to host bilingual workshops and webinars in English and Spanish to provide both employers and workers with information and resources to promote workplace safety and compliance. The 2025 workshops included:
  - February 5, 2025 – DEO hosted its second bilingual employer-focused webinar in collaboration with Public Health, Cal/OSHA, and the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC). This session provided key outreach partners with critical information on workplace safety standards, the health risks of silica dust exposure, and compliance requirements under Cal/OSHA regulations. Employers were further connected to hiring and training resources available through DEO and the AJCCs, including the Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) program. The IWT is a financial incentive that allows for upskilling of current employees through paid training, including the promotion of safe work practices. The webinar offered a Q&A segment, which allowed participants to engage directly with agency representatives to address specific concerns about implementing silica safety protocols.
  - April 12, 2025 – DEO, in collaboration with Public Health, conducted its first in-person employee-focused workshop at the Southeast LA AJCC, which attracted a modest three employees. Providers included a broad coalition of worker supporting organizations, Cal/OSHA, IDEPSCA, Pacoima Beautiful, LA City's Economic & Workforce Development Department (EWDD), and DEO and AJCC staff. The workshop featured presentations from our AJCC Business Services Representative team on the no-cost services available to employees, including job placement assistance, training opportunities, and supportive services. IDEPSCA presented on the health risks associated with silicosis, regulatory compliance standards, and proper use of PPE. Cal/OSHA conducted an interactive demonstration of the Powered Air-Purifying Respirator (PAPR), and breakout sessions allowed participants to discuss workplace concerns directly with experts. To ensure accessibility, all presentations were delivered in Spanish with English interpretation provided.
  - May 17, 2025 – DEO, in collaboration with DPH and Pacoima Beautiful, held a second in-person employee-focused workshop at Pacoima Beautiful's headquarters. This workshop focused on educating workers about silica exposure risks and practical strategies for workplace protection. The Northeast San Fernando Valley AJCC presented on no-cost services available to employees, while the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) provided a hands-on demonstration of respiratory protection devices, including PAPRs. Former Representative Tony Cárdenas attended the event, underscoring the importance of

worker protections and community partnerships. Pacoima Beautiful's canvassing resulted in a total of 10 employees from the stone fabrication industry participating in this session.

- DEO promoted these webinars and events via its network of AJCCs, DEO's partnership with LAEDC, and via DEO's own social media accounts. Silicosis-related information was also shared during Silicosis Awareness Month in June 2025.
3. **Engagement with Stone Fabrication Businesses:** DEO continues to conduct proactive outreach to the 285 stone fabrication businesses identified by the state, along with Public Health and Pacoima Beautiful. To date, 135 businesses have been contacted, resulting in 12 employers attending workshops/webinars. This list is being actively utilized by both DEO AJCCs and LAEDC's Business Technical Assistance (BTA) teams to distribute silicosis awareness materials, engage employers in safety training opportunities, and connect businesses to workforce development programs that support compliance and protect worker health.
  4. **Financial Support for Businesses and Workers:** DEO and its partners recognize that the costs associated with acquiring appropriate PPE can be a significant barrier for small businesses and their employees in the stone fabrication industry. Specifically, requiring universal compliance with all silica safety standards would cost millions of dollars if applied to all relevant businesses and employees across LA County.

DEO has not secured new funding sources for PPE support but continues to explore funding options ranging from federal and state grants to public-private partnerships and philanthropic contributions.

**Next Steps:** DEO will continue to participate in monthly convenings, webinars, and workshops; engage directly with stone fabrication businesses; and explore possible financial support for both businesses and workers.

## **Directive 6**

As previously reported, in December 2024, the State adopted a safety order on Occupational Exposures to Respirable Crystalline Silica, making previously temporary standards to maintain workplace requirements that help protect workers in the artificial stone fabrication industry permanent, effective January 2025. DPH continues to follow implementation of these standards by the State.

The Chief Executive Officer Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations branch (CEO-LAIR), in collaboration with DPH and DHS, engaged with Senator Menjivar's office throughout the 2025 legislative session to discuss her bill, SB 20, which would address, among other things, worker safety in the artificial stone fabrication industry by: 1) prohibiting a person or entity engaged in "high exposure trigger tasks" from using dry methods when engaging in those tasks; 2) requiring an owner or operator of a fabrication shop, or any individual who employs another individual to perform high-exposure trigger tasks in a fabrication shop, to ensure that any employee

who performs those tasks receives training and to provide to California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) a written attestation of that training; and 3) requiring the State Department of Public Health (CDPH) to conduct various activities related to silicosis case reporting and to address silicosis risk exposure in fabrications shops. SB 20 was signed by Governor Newsom on October 13, 2025.

DPH continues to work with CEO-LAIR and DHS to identify legislative and regulatory opportunities to strengthen regulatory standards and enhance resources for the enforcement of regulations on silica dust to ensure better compliance, as well as provide options for improving education and better enforcement of regulations.

### **Directive 7**

OWHS started conducting weekly outreach in June 2025 to engineered stone fabrication businesses with the support of two student interns through the Occupational Health Internship Program (OHIP), sponsored by UCLA's Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program (LOSH). This two-month project allowed OWHS to continue outreaching to local stone fabrication shops and stone showrooms once a week in the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys, Southeast LA County, and the South Bay. The interns worked on developing a toolkit containing content developed by OWHS and other tools and templates used by the County. The toolkit lays out how OWHS developed materials and trainings, connects with relevant stakeholders, and provides best practices when engaging workers and employers on silicosis awareness and prevention. Once finalized, this toolkit will be available as a resource for other local health departments to support their work in identifying cases of silicosis or engaging with high-risk ES fabrication workers and the community about silicosis awareness and prevention.

Considering current fiscal challenges, OWHS is planning to leverage existing resources and coordinate with other Public Health programs to provide silicosis prevention education to CBO partners already contracted by those programs. These trainings will enable CBOs already in the field to readily speak with community members on silicosis prevention, when relevant. These partnerships with existing CBO contractors can provide additional reach to impacted communities. For example, OWHS is doing a training for contracted organizations through the Community Public Health Teams initiative to provide education on silicosis and how to incorporate these issues into their outreach, when appropriate. The training is scheduled for November 4, 2025.

Since 2024, Public Health's Community and Field Services team has investigated silico-tuberculosis (silicosis with active tuberculosis) cases and led contact investigations in ES fabrication shops. As part of these investigations, the team obtains and reviews chest imaging. Among workers who have greater than seven 7 years' experience working with engineered-stone fabrication who were evaluated through these TB investigations, the prevalence of silicosis—including previously diagnosed and newly diagnosed cases—was 30-60%. These findings suggest substantial under-ascertainment in current surveillance; implementing localized

screening would likely identify many additional cases and should inform case-count modeling and planning for advanced care.

As the contracts with CBO partners have concluded and engineered stone associated silicosis cases continue to rise each month, there are significant barriers ahead to fulfilling Los Angeles County's goals of reducing the number of workers exposed to RCS and diagnosed with silicosis. However, integrating silicosis prevention education and outreach into Public Health's ongoing community-based work and housing these efforts within Public Health's newly established OWHS creates a foundation for sustaining this work. A brief summary of those opportunities and challenges is provided below.

### **Opportunities:**

The rebuilding of residential and commercial properties after the January fires presents an opportunity to partner with homeowners, architects, contractors, and interior designers to ensure they have accurate information on the safe use of engineered stone slab products and are aware of alternative materials with little or no silica.

OWHS has been meeting with architecture and interior design professionals to seek their input on feasibility of adopting alternative materials and discuss opportunities for sharing information and providing continuing education to local architects and designers. OWHS is working with the University of California at Berkeley's School of Public Health's Center for Occupational and Environmental Health (COEH) to assess opportunities to provide continuing education credits for professionals that attend our webinars through the International Interior Design Association (IIDA)-Southern California Chapter, American Institute of Architects (AIA), and the Interior Design Continuing Education Council (IDCEC). Additionally, OWHS is in discussions with the Georgia Institute of Technology about establishing a memorandum of understanding to collaborate as an Academic Health Department. If executed, this agreement could offer ongoing support and information sharing, increasing access for OWHS to the most current and timely research on preventing silica dust exposure in facilities that cut and fabricate engineered stone slab products with high silica content.

### **Challenges:**

Achieving changes in the way ES is fabricated faces a number of challenges. Currently, no direct economic assistance programs or tax incentives exist to assist employers seeking to improve workplace safety by upgrading tools and PPE in compliance with the Cal/OSHA Silica Standard.

In addition, recent federal immigration actions have created widespread fear among a predominantly immigrant workforce, placing worker health and safety at greater risk. These actions may drive workers to operate out of sight in unsafe conditions, increasing the likelihood of silica dust exposure.

At the same time, Public Health has limited resources to advance the silicosis prevention initiative. OWHS is working diligently to move this effort forward despite staffing constraints and the added

responsibility of managing other critical priorities, such as wildfire response and recovery support for workers. Additional support will be essential to ensure lasting impact and sustained efforts.

### **Closing and Next Steps**

The rise of engineered stone-associated silicosis in Los Angeles County highlights an urgent need for sustained prevention, screening, and treatment resources. While early detection improves survival, mandated screenings are not being delivered at the necessary scale due to industry non-compliance, worker misclassification, limited workers' compensation, and anticipated Medi-Cal cuts for undocumented workers. These gaps leave thousands at risk and shift the cost of care to local safety-net systems and taxpayers. Despite these constraints, Public Health has developed strong partnerships, public awareness tools, and community outreach. The creation of the Office of Worker Health and Safety establishes a durable platform to coordinate action and advocate for critical resources to protect workers.

Public Health and its partners will continue coordinating with state, local, community, and academic partners through monthly convenings, shared resources, and coordinated outreach to strengthen silicosis awareness and education. Priorities include finalizing and distributing a resource toolkit for other local health jurisdictions, integrating silicosis education into broader community health programs, and exploring partnerships to provide access to screenings. Efforts will also focus on engaging architects and interior designers to educate stakeholders and consumers about alternative material choices. In parallel, Public Health and partners will continue to work with CEO-LAIR and other stakeholders to advance legislative and regulatory efforts, strengthen enforcement of silica safety standards, expand protections for workers, and support businesses with compliance.

Please let me know if you have any questions or require any additional information.

BF:ak:lpm

cc: Chief Executive Officer  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
County Counsel  
Department of Economic Opportunity  
Department of Health Services  
Department of Mental Health  
Department of Public Works