

HAZARD WARNING: SILICA DUST FROM COUNTERTOP WORK

DO YOU WORK WITH ENGINEERED STONE, QUARTZ, GRANITE, OR OTHER STONE PRODUCTS?

Cutting, grinding, chipping, sanding, drilling, and polishing these products can harm you. These tasks put dangerous levels of silica dust into the air. You can then breathe in the dust. Engineered stone is the most dangerous. It has much more silica than other kinds of stone.

Silica dust can get far into your lungs. This can cause a disease called silicosis. Silicosis makes scars in the lungs and leads to trouble breathing.

WORKER DEATHS IN CALIFORNIA

In 2018, two men from the same countertop fabrication shop died of silicosis. They worked polishing, cutting, and grinding stone countertops. They worked mostly with engineered stone for a few years. The men were 36 and 38 years old when they died.



Water and dust-capture systems can decrease dust levels.

There is no cure for silicosis, and many workers have died from it. It may start as trouble breathing, coughing, and feeling very tired. Silica dust can also cause lung cancer, kidney problems, and other diseases.

HOW YOUR WORKPLACE MUST KEEP YOU SAFE

Cal/OSHA makes health and safety rules for workplaces and enforces them. Under these rules your employer must measure or assess how much silica dust is in the air.

If dust levels may be at or above 25 micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air (this is called the Action Level) your employer must:

- Train you about silica, how it affects your health, and how to work safely
- Assess the airborne silica exposures in your workplace

Cal/OSHA also sets a limit on how much silica can be in the air you breathe. This is the Permissible Exposure Limit, or PEL. The PEL for silica is 50 micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air averaged over an 8-hour work shift. If the silica dust is above this limit, your employer must lower the amount of dust in the air. Wet methods are one way to keep dust from getting into the air. “Wet methods” means using tools that spray or pour water on the stone you are working on. Using dust-catching (capture) systems along with wet methods is even safer.

If wet methods and dust-capture methods are used and the airborne dust is still above the PEL, your employer must also:

- Have a health care provider assess if wearing a respirator is safe for you
- Give you a respirator and train you how to use it

SILICA MEDICAL EXAMS

Your employer must send you to the doctor if the silica level is above the PEL of 50 micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air. After June 23, 2020, workers must be sent to the doctor if silica levels are 25 micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air or higher. These rules are for people who work 30 or more days a year at these levels. Exams must include a medical and work history. They must also include a physical exam and chest x-ray. Doctors will also test how well your lungs are working.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH

- Make sure the dust-capture system pulls the dust away from you.
- Learn how to clean and maintain your dust reduction systems.
- Keep the surface wet enough so it does not dry out while you are working.
 - Make sure water is pointed at the part of the stone you are working on.
 - Add more water if needed. Sometimes you can use a hose to keep water flowing.
- To clean up dust, use wet sweeping or vacuums that have high efficiency (HEPA) filters. It is not safe to dry sweep or use compressed air to clean surfaces or clothes.
- Inspect, clean, store, and wear your respirator correctly.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE SYMPTOMS FROM BREATHING DUST?

See a doctor if you are coughing or have trouble breathing. If you think something at work is causing your symptoms, let your supervisor know. Your supervisor may send you to see a doctor who treats work-related health problems. Before you go to the doctor, write down the names of products used at work. If you can, ask your supervisor for a Safety Data Sheet (SDS). The SDS lists what is in the product and how it can affect health. Show these to the doctor and tell the doctor when you started having breathing problems. If you do not have an SDS, bring this Hazard Warning.

RESOURCES

- The CDPH Occupational Health Branch has more information at: www.cdph.ca.gov/silica-stonefabricators
- Link to a webinar about working safely with natural and engineered stone products: <https://www.cdc.gov/nora/councils/resp/webinars.html>
- More information about the Cal/OSHA Silica Standard: <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/respiratory-silica-FAQ.html>

For more information, contact the CDPH Occupational Health Branch at occhealth@cdph.ca.gov or call (800) 970-6680.

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Wet methods and dust-capture systems are safer for workers.