

Silica Precautions

Exposure to fine particles of silica has been shown to cause silicosis, a serious and sometimes fatal lung disease. Employees who inhale fine particles of silica may be at risk of developing this disease. There is no cure for silicosis. The only treatment for silicosis is prevention, or avoiding exposure to silica dust.

The natural stone industry and its vendors have made great strides in this effort to eliminate unseen crystalline silica dust, but there is still a long way to go. One of the best methods to reduce the silica dust is through wet cutting and grinding.

Safety Precautions for Workers

In shops that are dry or partially wet, or where only sections of the facility are covered with dust collection systems, these precautions should be taken to minimize exposure to crystalline silica:

Do

- Be aware of the hazards of inhaling silica dust.
- Use an air monitoring system to ensure the PEL is not exceeded.
- Always wear a respirator when the need for one is indicated.
- Be sure your respirator fits properly and has been maintained properly.
- Use water or wet vacs to clean up dust — never compressed air.
- Wear washable or disposable work clothes.
- Wash hands and face before eating, drinking or smoking outside of dusty areas.
- Always shower, if possible, and change to street clothes before leaving the work area.
- Park cars where they will not be contaminated with silica and other substances.
- Always report any symptoms of silicosis.
- Limit your exposure to the workplace. When you take silica dust home, you contaminate your house and your car. You will be exposing your family to crystalline silica dust as well.



Don't

- Ignore silica warning signs.
- Work without a respirator when silica exceeds PELs.
- Eat, drink, smoke, or apply cosmetics in areas that contain crystalline silica.
- Eat, drink, smoke, or apply cosmetics after silica exposure until you have washed your face and hands.
- Smoke if you are exposed to crystalline silica on the job.

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.