



August 30, 2013

SAFETY BULLETIN

Federal OSHA Announces New Proposed Silica Rule: How You Can Keep Your Employees Safe When Working with Silica Exposures

On August 23, 2013, OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) announced a proposed [new rule on silica](#). The new rule proposes to lower the permissible exposure limit (PEL) for the construction industry from 250 micrograms per cubic meter of air (250 ug/m³) to 50 micrograms (50 ug/m³) averaged over an 8-hour workday. The rule further proposes to implement an **action level** of 25 micrograms (25 ug/m³) which triggers additional periodic surveillance until air sampling falls under the action level for two consecutive monitoring assessments.

Cal/OSHA’s current silica PEL is 100 micrograms per cubic meter of air (100 ug/m³) – a limit that is less than half of OSHA’s current 250 ug/m³. However, the proposed federal limit would be half of California’s current limit and the action level even lower at seventy-five percent of the current Cal/OSHA standard. While the implications of the federal proposal to California are undetermined at this point, it is clear that our regulatory bodies are pushing for ways to reduce worker exposure to silica dust and it is a good time to examine the recommended practices to keep our workforce safe.

The “Resources” table below provides links to regulatory agency and association websites where you can find information on some of the key elements to working safely with silica including health issues that can impact those that work with silica, methods employers can use to control employee exposure, and training tips to help employees understand their role in being safe on the job.

Fundamental methods that can be used to limit silica exposure are:

- Isolate** - Limit workers’ access to areas where they could be exposed above the PEL;
- Wet-Cut** – Use water sprays or saws that supply water to the blade to suppress dust;
- Ventilate** - Use dust controls like vacuum or ventilation systems; and
- Protect** – Respiratory protection is the method of last resort but can be utilized in accordance with a written Respiratory Protection Program when other methods of control do not reduce exposure sufficiently or are unfeasible.

RESOURCES

Cal/OSHA	http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/etools/08-019/sources.htm	Silica regulations, exposure limits, and control methods can be found at this site
OSHA	https://www.osha.gov/silica/index.html	1-800-321-OSHA
Toolbox Talk materials	www.elcosh.org	Select “Bricklayer” under Trades
MCAA	www.masoncontractors.org	Visit the Silica Resource Center using your MCAA member login
Center for Construction Research & Training (CPWR)	http://www.silica-safe.org/	A one-stop source of information on preventing silica hazards
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)	http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/silica/	1-800-35-NIOSH