



New Jersey
Work Environment Council
Safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment

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OSHA Issues Final Rule on Crystalline Silica

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For Immediate Release, March 31, 2016:

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has mandated new limits on exposure to silica dust. Workers may be exposed to silica on the job in construction, mining, shipbuilding and other industries.

The dangers of exposure to respirable crystalline silica have been known since the 1930s. Standards to limit exposure were set in the 1970s when OSHA was created. However, there has been a decades-long process to update the limits to better protect today's workers.

The new standard requires that employers reduce silica dust and monitor workers' exposure. The final rule reduces the permissible exposure limit to silica to 50 micrograms per cubic meter of air during an 8-hour work shift. This change reduces allowable dust by two to five times the current limit. Employers are also supposed to wet down areas, improve ventilation and provide medical exams and training.

Silica is used as an abrasive blasting agent and can lead to silicosis, a progressive and often fatal lung disease. Exposure to silica dust can also lead to lung cancer, tuberculosis, bronchitis and scleroderma. OSHA estimates that the new rules may prevent approximately 700 deaths annually.

“Workers across America can breathe easier today,” said National Council on Occupational Safety and Health Acting Executive Director Jessica Martinez. “We’ve known for decades that silica dust is deadly. With new common-sense rules in place to limit exposure, we can save lives and reduce suffering from silicosis, cancer and other life-threatening diseases.”

“Perhaps we can say goodbye to the sight of former construction workers connected by plastic tubes to portable oxygen tanks and concentrators due to lung damage caused by breathing in too much silica dust during their careers,” said Ken Hoffner, Assistant Director for the NJ Laborers Health and Safety Fund.

The New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) has produced a new [Public Service Announcement about silica](#). The spot will be airing on radio and television stations in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

“The new OSHA rule is a victory for all workers. There is no reason going to work should put your life at risk,” said Dan Fatton, WEC Executive Director. “We’re pleased the final rule was released after so many years of tireless work by advocates. WEC looks forward to continuing our work educating and training at-risk workers about how to prevent injuries.”

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About WEC

The New Jersey Work Environment Council is an alliance of 70 labor, community, and environmental organizations advocating for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. For more information, please visit www.njwec.org.