

SAFETY ALERT

Silica Update — Issues & Solutions

Silica Issues: Silicosis is a disabling, nonreversible and sometimes fatal lung disease caused by overexposure to respirable crystalline silica. Silica is the second most common mineral in the earth's crust and is a major component of sand, rock and mineral ores. Overexposure to dust that contains microscopic particles of crystalline silica can cause scar tissue to form in the lungs, which reduces the lungs ability to extract oxygen from the air we breathe. Typical sand found at the beach does not pose a silicosis threat.

Each year more than 250 American workers die with silicosis. More than 1 million U.S. workers are exposed to crystalline silica. There is no cure for the disease, but it is 100 percent preventable if employers, employees, and health professionals work together to reduce exposures.

Silica Solutions: Employers may make a commitment to prevent silicosis at their work sites by doing the following:

- The first step in this process is to perform air monitoring to determine exposure potentials and where necessary initiate corrective action which should first involve engineering controls, with additional personal protective/administrative controls as deemed necessary.
- Tipout areas should be kept clean and water spray used in dry weather to keep dust to a minimum.
- Mixer areas should be equipped with a dust collection system and plants should follow good housekeeping procedures.
- Yards and in-plant roadways should be maintained with a water truck, sprinkler system, or approved chemical suppressant.
- Forklifts with enclosed cabs, closed doors, and air conditioners can help minimize exposure.

Working in any dusty environment where crystalline silica is present potentially can increase a person's chances of getting silicosis. If a number of workers are working in a dusty environment and one is diagnosed with silicosis, the others should be examined. The concrete pipe industry will continue to research and use the best procedures to control silica dust for the protection of our workers, customers, visitors, and neighbors.