

# safety matters

Construction  
Toolbox Talks for

From your safety partners at Cool Insuring Agency, Inc.

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## Silica Exposure Precautions

Found in commonly used materials such as concrete, asphalt, coal dust and natural stone, silica particles can be inhaled when dust is created during handling.

### What's a Little Dust?

Although silica looks like dust, it's much more harmful to your lungs. Silica dust is a human lung carcinogen, and breathing it in causes the formation of scar tissue on the lungs, reducing the lungs' ability to take in oxygen. Without proper protection, exposure poses a serious threat to workers. The most severe exposures to silica dust result from abrasive blasting, but those working on cement and brick construction sites are at a high risk as well.

### Silica Safety Precautions

When working with silica, take the following precautions to protect yourself and others.

- Use all available work practices—water sprays, ventilation systems and blasting cabinets—to control dust exposures.
- If you're working with a new material, check the label for silica. If silica is listed, refer to the product's Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for more information.
- Always wear proper personal protective equipment. When respirator protection is required, wear only a N100 NIOSH-certified respirator, or a Type CE abrasive-blast supplied-air respirator for abrasive blasting.
- Make sure you are properly trained in the use and maintenance of your respirator. Contact your supervisor or other designated person if you need assistance or have any questions.
- Don't alter the respirator in any way.
- Always inspect your respirator before use. Alert your supervisor and replace your respirator if you find a crack, puncture, tear, leak or any other unusual condition.
- Shave facial hair when you're going to be working in environments that require a respirator. Even a tight-fitting respirator will not create a good seal between the respirator and your face if you have a beard or mustache.
- Wear disposable or washable work clothes and shower if facilities are available. Vacuum the dust from your clothes or change into clean clothing before leaving the worksite.
- Be aware of the operations and job tasks creating silica exposures in your workplace environment and know how to protect yourself. Ask your supervisor if you have any questions.
- Be aware of the health hazards related to crystalline silica exposure. Habits like smoking can add to lung damage caused by silica.
- Don't eat, drink, smoke or apply cosmetics in areas where silica dust is present. Wash your hands and face outside of dusty areas before performing any of these activities.

### Take Extra Care

Remember, take extra care at all times when working with silica—a little dust now can cause big health problems later.

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