

LCCA SAFETY UPDATE

It's not just dust, it's SILICA!

By John E. Schumacher, CSP
Assurance Safety Consulting

Silica

"It's not just dust, its silica!!" That is a slogan that was made popular a few years back when silicosis prevention programs were being promoted within the construction industry. Silicosis prevention continues to gain more attention within the construction (safety) industry and remains a local emphasis program for OSHA in Northern Illinois.

Crystalline silica is the basic component of quartz, granite rock and sand. Operations that create silica dust include: dry cutting of concrete, quarrying, dry cutting concrete blocks, mixing bags of mortar or concrete, sweeping floors with concrete or mortar dust.

What is Silicosis?

The inhalation of crystalline silica dust over a period of time can cause silicosis. Silicosis is a disabling, progressive and nonreversible disease, involving scarring of lung tissue. The development of this scar tissue on the lung lessens the lung's ability to take in oxygen from the air.

Silicosis is a progressive disease that has no cure!

Whose Issue is it?

Worker's exposure to silica dust continues to be a focus of OSHA inspections in Northern Illinois. Members of LCCA need to know that operations creating silica dust will be a target for OSHA. In addition, general contractors running the project as well as other trade companies that have exposed employees may be at risk of receiving OSHA citations.

This issue is not OSHA, but rather the safety of the workforce on the job.

Safety Measures:

Many safety measures can be followed and will vary based on operations that create the silica dust. Some of the more common methods include:

- Use wet methods for cutting concrete, masonry block, brick, etc.
- Use ventilation to remove dust from the breathing zone.
- Wear approved respirators when exposed to dust. But all efforts must be made to first eliminate the creation of the dust.

Information is also available at www.osha.gov. Type in key word "silica". For additional information or assistance with safety issues, contact John Schumacher at Assurance Safety Consulting - 847/463-7224.



An example of a water bottle attachment for a concrete / block saw. Use of engineering controls, such as this water bottle are required by OSHA to eliminate silica dust exposure to employees.

May 28, 2008