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TOOLBOX TALK.
SILICA DUST

Know the exposure, use the controls, reduce your risk

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What's the damage?

The dangers of silica dust exposure

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Exposure to silica dust increases your risk of developing cancer.

In Australia 600,000 workers are exposed to silica dust at work each year.

Where is silica found?

- Artificial or engineered stone benchtops
- Natural stone, such as limestone, sandstone, ironstone, marble, granite
- Part of bricks, concrete and mortar
- Plastic composites like fillers or composite panels
- Tiles and slates on our roofs
- Found naturally in stone, rocks, sand, gravel and clay

What is silica dust?

- Created when materials containing silica are broken down
- Released into the air during tasks such as cutting, drilling or grinding
- Tiny silica dust particles float in the air and are easily breathed in, they are 100 times smaller than a grain of sand

What makes silica dust?

- Breaking, crushing, grinding or milling materials like concrete and aggregate
- Drilling, cutting or sanding things like bricks and concrete
- Dealing with cement
- Laying, maintaining or replacing ballast
- Excavating, mining, quarrying or tunneling
- Abrasive blasting
- Dry sweeping after a task where silica dust has been created

Which of these is right?

- You won’t get lung damage after you blow your nose after breathing in dust
- I’m OK if I’m working outside
- The work I’m doing only takes a short time, so I’ll be fine
- The dust will clear quickly

How can silica dust harm our health?

Silica dust can be harmful if you breathe it in and can cause these diseases:

- **Lung cancer**
- **Silicosis**
- **Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease**
- **Asthma**

What is a ‘Workplace Exposure Standard’?

- The maximum allowable concentration in workplace air
- In Australia the standard is 0.1mg/m3 over an eight-hour day
- This is currently under review - a reduced standard of 0.05g/m3 has been recommended by work health and safety regulators
- Breathing in more than the WES over an 8 hour day can increase your risk of lung cancer and other diseases

What can you do to control exposure?

- Eliminate the use of high silica content materials
- Use local exhaust ventilation to remove dust at the point it is produced
- Ensure tools have on-tool extraction
- Wet down the work to keep dust levels lower
- Wear suitable respiratory protective equipment that fits properly
- Clean up correctly – no dry sweeping of silica containing materials

What we are doing to protect you?

- Cut down on how much silica dust is produced in the first place during planning
- Use safer products such as autoclaved aerated concrete in place of concrete masonry
- Provide equipment that have dust suppression features
- Provide health monitoring to workers exposed to silica dust

What are you going to do differently?

Thank you for listening.

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