TOOLBOX TALK.
SILICA DUST
For Managers and OHS Officers

Know the exposure, use the controls, reduce your risk

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Silica Dust: The Risks

Introducing the risks from silica dust – a briefing for managers
Silica dust can give you cancer.
Setting the scene.

• Silica is a natural mineral that makes up a large part of materials like sandstone and granite
• Engineered or artificial stone benchtops contain up to 95% silica
• It’s also found in many common products such as concrete and bricks
• Silica dust is created when silica is broken down and released into the air when people carry out tasks such as cutting, drilling or grinding
• Breathing in silica dust can damage people’s lungs and can lead to serious diseases, including lung cancer and silicosis
Why is this our problem?

• We need to consider our workers and their exposure to silica dust
• As a responsible business, we want to make sure that people don’t get harmed at work
• In Australia, there is a legal duty to check the level of risk from silica dust exposure
• By law, employers are required to ensure the health and safety of their workers at their workplace and have the duty to control the risks associated with work
• … Are our competitors or suppliers doing this better than us?
In Australia 600,000 workers exposed to silica dust at work each year
An estimated 5758 of these workers will develop lung cancer over the course of their life
Recommended exposure limit

- The mandatory limit for silica dust exposure in Australia is currently 0.1mg/m³ over an eight-hour day
- This is currently under review by Safe Work Australia and it has been proposed to reduce this to 0.05mg/m³
- There is currently no evidence to suggest there is a safe level of silica dust exposure
What’s our first step?

Check if:

• Employees are working with materials containing silica
• Silica dust levels in your workplace has potential to exceed the exposure limit (an occupational hygienist can assist with this)
• Recommended control measures are in place to reduce exposure
What action do we need to take?

The Hierarchy of Controls

1. Eliminate (get rid of)
2. Substitute (change)
3. Engineer controls (make something new)
4. Administrative controls (instructions and signs)
5. Personal protective equipment (gloves, earplugs)
What action do we need to take?

There are things we can do to safeguard our workforce, for example:

• Using materials with lower silica levels; eliminate the use of artificial stone
• Selecting the correct equipment for the job with dust suppression features
• Use local exhaust ventilation systems
• Ensure tools have on-tool extraction
• Use water suppression whenever possible
• Wear properly fitting respiratory protective equipment
Thank you for listening.

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