TOOLBOX TALK
SILICA DUST

Know the exposure, use the controls, reduce your risk

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For information and support call us on 13 11 20
What’s the damage?

The dangers of silica dust exposure
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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