

Pinnacol Pointers for Safety Group Programs

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Managing the Worksite Risks of Crystalline Silica

Winter driving. Heavy lifting. Office ergonomics. Slips, trips and falls. Your organization is taking steps to manage risks you can see, hear and touch. But there's one risk so small it can be viewed only with a microscope. Yet this small hazard poses big risks to your workers.

One of the most common minerals on our planet, crystalline silica is in sand, stone, rock, concrete, brick, block and mortar. Your employees may be using products or materials that contain crystalline silica and not even know it. If your workplace is a dusty one or if your employees work with materials that produce dust, your organization should take steps to evaluate and manage the risks of crystalline silica.

Respirable crystalline silica can cause silicosis, a disabling and sometimes fatal lung disease. Workers in sandblasting; sand-casting foundry operations; mining; tunneling; cement/concrete cutting and demolition; masonry production and cutting; and granite cutting, grinding and polishing experience especially high rates of silicosis.

Has your company evaluated the extent of employee exposure to this hazard? Pinnacol Assurance's on-staff industrial hygienists can help detect and evaluate on-the-job exposure to this and other airborne contaminants, and recommend steps to reduce the risks. Additionally, Pinnacol's website shares guidance, tools and procedures that can improve respiratory protection at your worksite.

The U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) sets "permissible exposure limits" for crystalline silica in the workplace. A new rule is expected from OSHA in early 2016, and your organization can check [OSHA's website](#) for updates and additional information.

The new rule would replace OSHA's 40-year-old standard. This outdated standard, according to OSHA, fails to adequately protect employee health. The new rule, OSHA says, "would save more than 600 lives and prevent more than 1,500 new cases of silicosis per year."*

How can you eliminate or control crystalline silica exposure at your workplace? Here are some suggestions:

- Use substitute materials that don't contain crystalline silica.
- Use dust-containment systems.
- Work wet, using wet drilling or sawing to control dust.
- Ventilate.
- Use personal protective equipment, such as respirators, when necessary.
- Monitor the air and workers' health.
- Require good personal hygiene.
- Train workers on the risks and ways to mitigate them.
- Communicate, using product labels and safety data sheets.
- Post signs that clearly communicate warnings and required protective gear.

Pinnacol Resources

For more information on shoring up safeguards against the hazards of crystalline silica at your organization, visit the [Resources](#) web page at Pinnacol.com. Or call Pinnacol's Safety On Call hotline at 303-361-4700 or 888-501-4752. Our safety services team stands ready to answer questions and help keep your workforce safe, healthy and on the job.

* <https://www.osha.gov/silica/index.html>

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