

Silica Emergency Temporary Standard: Information for Workers

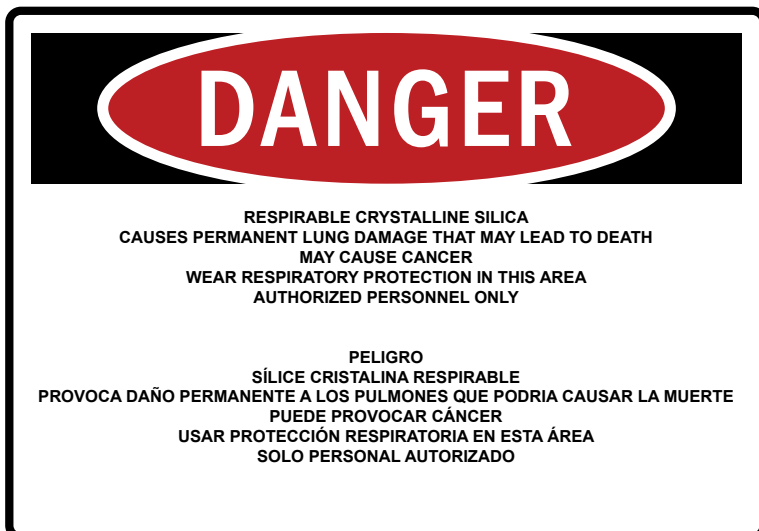
California is experiencing a silicosis epidemic among artificial stone fabrication workers.

Artificial stone has become more widely used, especially in the manufacture of countertops. It contains more than 93% crystalline silica — **more than double that for granite** — so it is more hazardous to workers exposed to airborne dust.

The crystalline forms of silica are more hazardous when workers are exposed to airborne particle sizes smaller than the diameter of a human hair. This is known as “respirable” dust, and breathing too much airborne respirable crystalline silica (RCS) can cause:

- Silicosis — an incurable lung disease — and other lung effects
- Lung cancer
- Kidney and autoimmune diseases

High-exposure trigger tasks — such as machining, cutting, grinding, and drilling of artificial stone and natural stone containing more than 10% crystalline silica—are especially concerning. This includes clean up, disturbing, or handling of dust created during these types of tasks.



What employers must do to protect workers

Comply with Title 8 California Code of Regulations (T8CCR) **section 5204** when they are required to. This includes Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) changes intended to better protect employees working with artificial stone and natural stone containing more than 10% crystalline silica. This fact sheet only provides an overview — refer to section 5204 for details on all the requirements.

- **Where there is any employee exposure.**
 - Promptly report any confirmed RCS exposure-related silicosis or cancer case to the California Department of Health and Cal/OSHA.
 - Communicate the following in a language and manner workers can understand:
 - The exposure symptoms, such as cough, difficulty breathing, fatigue, shortness of breath, weakness, fever, chest pain, or unexpected weight loss.
 - The specific tasks where there is RCS exposure, including high-exposure trigger tasks.
 - The measures the employer has implemented to reduce worker exposures, such as using machines and tools with sufficient water.
 - How to properly use and implement engineering and work practice controls, and respiratory protection.
 - The contents of section 5204.
 - The purpose and description of the medical surveillance program.
 - The increased risk of death associated with the combined effects of smoking and RCS exposure.
 - The increased risk of tuberculosis infection becoming active.
 - That employees are encouraged to report any related symptoms without fear of reprisal.

- **When there are high-exposure trigger tasks.** Ensure additional precautions for their workers, such as:
 - Assume worker exposures are high and conduct initial and repeat airborne RCS exposure monitoring at least every 12 months. **Affected workers, or their designated representatives must be provided with the results and have the right to observe any monitoring—including tasks that are not high-exposure—that represents their exposures to airborne RCS.**
 - Conduct all such tasks within regulated areas that are clearly identified by warning signs.
 - Only use effective water controls to reduce worker exposures to airborne dust.
 - Use good housekeeping and hygiene practices that involve only wet methods or high-efficiency (HEPA) vacuums; properly worn respirators; and readily available washing facilities.
 - Prohibit the use of compressed air, dry sweeping, or shoveling to clean off surfaces.
 - Prohibit worker rotation to reduce exposure to RCS.
 - Include additional information in the written exposure control program, such as worker exposure records and procedures for ensuring proper worker training on how to prevent RCS airborne exposure, and how to properly put on and take off personal protective equipment and work clothing.

A full-face, tight-fitting powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR), or a respirator providing equal or greater protection, equipped with a HEPA, N100, or P100 filter must be used by workers. With some exceptions, combination filter cartridges that include organic vapors must be used with artificial stone. A full-face, tight-fitting positive pressure supplied air respirator must be provided for workers under certain circumstances.

How to protect yourself

Be knowledgeable of the hazards of airborne crystalline silica and ask your employer what is being done to protect you. The following are useful sources of information:

Cal/OSHA

[Occupational Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica: section 5204](#)

California Department of Public Health

[Silica Safety Resources for Stone Fabricators](#)

[Stone Fabrication Worker Hazard Alert | Spanish | Chinese \(Traditional\)](#)

Natural Stone Institute

[Silicosis: An Industry Guide to Awareness and Prevention](#)

NIOSH

[Workplace Safety and Health Topics](#)

OSHA

Crystalline Silica

You should be evaluated for silicosis if you have any of the following symptoms for 14 days or more, not explained by another illness: cough, difficulty breathing, fatigue, shortness of breathing, weakness, fever, chest pain, or unexpected weight loss. Your employer is required to provide you with the name of a healthcare provider who will evaluate you, without charging you for this service.

You have the right to contact Cal/OSHA if your workplace is dusty or you have other workplace safety concerns.

Contacting Cal/OSHA is confidential — Cal/OSHA will not reveal your identity to your employer; will not question your legal status; and will not report your name to immigration authorities. You can find the nearest Cal/OSHA office on the poster that all employers must display in the workplace that lists the addresses and phone numbers of Cal/OSHA offices. You can also call 833-579-0927 or go to www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Complaint.htm.

December 2023

