

Respirable Crystalline Silica: OSHA Updates General Industry and Maritime Standard

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PRACTICES OSHA, Labor and Employment

In an effort to better protect workers, OSHA issued an updated respirable crystalline silica standard for general industry and maritime, which became effective on June 23, 2016. This is the first update to the Standard since its adoption in 1971.¹ The updated general industry standard requires employers to limit worker exposure to respirable crystalline silica and implement other safety measures to protect employees from silicosis, lung cancer, and other respiratory diseases.

Key Revisions

Scope of the Standard: The Standard requires employers to determine the amount of silica that workers are exposed to if it may reasonably be expected to be at or above the action level of 25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ averaged over an 8-hour day.² The Standard also requires employers to protect employees from exposures above the permissible exposure limit (“PEL”) of 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ averaged over an 8-hour day.³ The scope of the Standard has been revised to exclude low exposure tasks, “where worker exposures to respirable crystalline silica will remain below 25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ as an 8-hour time-weighted average under any foreseeable condition.”⁴ An employer is required to provide evidence of the exposure level to benefit from this exception. The Standard does not apply to exposure from processing sorptive clays. Further, the Standard allows employers to comply with the specified control methods instead of the PEL in some circumstances.

Dust Control Methods: The Standard requires employer to use dust controls and safer work methods to protect employees from silica exposures. Acceptable methods include: wet methods that apply water at the point where the silica dust is made; local exhaust ventilation that removes silica dust at or near the point it is made; and enclosures that isolate the employee or work process creating the silica dust.

Written Exposure Control Plan: The Standard requires employers to develop and implement a written exposure plan that identifies any tasks that may expose employees to silica and methods to protect employees.

Regulated Areas: The final general industry standard requires regulated areas where the exposure to workers exceeds PEL. These areas must have warning signs posted at their entrances.

Medical Surveillance: The Standard requires medical surveillance to be available to employees exposed at or above the action level for 30 or more days per year. Employers are required to obtain written medical opinions for examinations done pursuant to the Standard. Information to the employer is limited to the date of the examination, statement that the examination met the requirements and any limitation recommended regarding the employee’s use of respirators. If the employee provides written authorization, the employer may also obtain any recommended limitations on the employee’s exposure and any referral to a specialist.

Compliance Deadline: General industry employers have two years after the effective date to comply with most provisions. Further, there is a staggered implementation schedule to comply with medical surveillance requirements.

Deadline by which employers must comply with substantially all of the Standard	June 23, 2018
Deadline by which medical surveillance must be offered to employees who will be exposed above PEL for 30 or more days a year	June 23, 2018
Deadline by which medical surveillance must be offered for employees who will be exposed at or above the action level for 30 or more days a year.	June 23, 2018

¹ [OSHA's Proposed Crystalline Silica Rule: Overview](#), OSHA Fact Sheet.

² 29 CFR 1910.1053

³ *Id.*

⁴ [OSHA's Crystalline Silica Rule: Stakeholder Participation and Changes to the Standards](#), OSHA FACT SHEET.