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US Department of Labor's OSHA announces proposed rule to protect workers exposed to crystalline silica

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration today announced a proposed rule aimed at curbing lung cancer, silicosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and kidney disease in America's workers. The proposal seeks to lower worker exposure to crystalline silica, which kills hundreds of workers and sickens thousands more each year. After publication of the proposal, the public will have 90 days to submit written comments, followed by public hearings.

"Exposure to silica can be deadly, and limiting that exposure is essential," said Dr. David Michaels, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health. "Every year, exposed workers not only lose their ability to work, but also to breathe. This proposal is expected to prevent thousands of deaths from silicosis—an incurable and progressive disease—as well as lung cancer, other respiratory diseases and kidney disease. We're looking forward to public comment on the proposal."

Once the full effects of the rule are realized, OSHA estimates that the proposed rule would result in saving nearly 700 lives per year and prevent 1,600 new cases of silicosis annually.

Exposure to airborne silica dust occurs in operations involving cutting, sawing, drilling and crushing of concrete, brick, block and other stone products and in operations using sand products, such as in glass manufacturing, foundries and sand blasting.

The proposal is based on extensive review of scientific and technical evidence, consideration of current industry consensus standards and outreach by OSHA to stakeholders, including public stakeholder meetings, conferences and meetings with employer and employee organizations.

"The proposed rule uses common sense measures that will protect workers' lives and lungs—like keeping the material wet so dust doesn't become airborne," added Michaels. "It is designed to give employers flexibility in selecting ways to meet the standard."

The proposed rulemaking includes two separate standards—one for general industry and maritime employment, and one for construction.

The agency currently enforces 40-year-old permissible exposure limits (PELs) for crystalline silica in general industry, construction and shipyards that are outdated, inconsistent between industries and do not adequately protect worker health. The proposed rule brings protections into the 21st century.

The proposed rule includes a new exposure limit for respirable crystalline silica and details widely used methods for controlling worker exposure, conducting medical surveillance, training workers about silica-related hazards and recordkeeping measures.

U.S. Department of Labor news materials are accessible at <http://www.dol.gov>. The information above is available in large print, Braille, audio tape or disc from the COAST office upon request by calling 202-693-7828 or TTY 202-693-7755.



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OSHA rulemaking relies heavily on input from the public and the agency will conduct extensive engagement to garner feedback from the public through both written and oral comments. OSHA will accept public comments on the proposed rule for 90 days following publication in the Federal Register, followed by public hearings. Once public hearings conclude, members of the public who filed a notice of intention to appear can then submit additional post-hearing comments. Additional information on the proposed rule, including a video; procedures for submitting comments and the public hearings can be found at www.osha.gov/silica.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to assure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit <http://www.osha.gov>.

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