

CN4

COSHH essentials in construction: Silica



This information will help employers (including the self-employed) comply with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

Regulations 2002 (COSHH), as amended, to control exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS) and protect workers' health.

It is also useful for trade union safety representatives.

This sheet describes good practice using engineering control - water suppression.

It covers the points you need to follow to reduce exposure to an adequate level.

It is important to follow all the points, or use equally effective measures.

Main points

- High dust levels result from crushing and screening.
- Breathing in dust may cause silicosis.
- Keep exposure as low as possible using all the controls in this sheet. Make sure the controls work.

Crushing and screening demolition material

Control approach 2 Engineering control

Hazard

- ✓ Construction work can produce airborne respirable crystalline silica (RCS).
- ✓ All RCS is hazardous, causing silicosis. This is a serious lung disease causing permanent disability and early death.
- ✓ Silicosis is made worse by smoking.
- ✓ 'Respirable' means that the dust can get to the deepest parts of the lung. Such fine dust is invisible under normal lighting.
- ✓ Keep inhalation of RCS as low as possible.
- ✓ When all controls are applied properly, less than 0.1 mg/m³ RCS is usually achievable (based on an 8-hour time-weighted average).

Crystalline silica concentrations in common materials

- ✓ See table in sheet CNO.

Access and premises

- ✓ Only allow access to authorised staff.
- ✓ Secure a good supply of water for dust suppression.

Equipment

- ✓ Use equipment fitted with water suppression to minimise the amount of dust created.
- ✓ Fit water suppression at crushing and transfer points.

Procedures

- ✓ Check that there is adequate water for dust suppression and confirm that it is working before starting work.

Maintenance, examination and testing

- ✓ Minerals and silica-containing dusts are very abrasive. Plan regular maintenance.
- ✓ Follow instructions in maintenance manuals - keep equipment in effective and efficient working order.
- ✓ Clean down the equipment before starting maintenance - use wet or dustless methods.
- ✓ If the water suppression is faulty, stop work until it is repaired.
- ✓ Daily, look for signs of damage. Make repairs.
- ✓ At least once a week, check that water suppression works properly.
- ✓ Get a competent engineer to examine the system thoroughly and test its performance regularly.
- ✓ Examine and test RPE thoroughly at least once every three months.

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- ✓ Keep records of all examinations and tests for at least five years.
 - ✓ Review records - failure patterns show where preventive maintenance is needed.
 - ✓ Carry out air sampling to check that the controls are working well. See sheet G409.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- ✓ Ask your supplier, or the company health and safety advisor to help you select the right PPE.

Respiratory protective equipment (RPE)

- ✓ RPE should not be needed if the controls work properly. However RPE may be needed for work near the equipment while it is running and is often needed for maintenance and some cleaning jobs.
- ✓ Select RPE that suits the wearer, the job and the work environment.
- ✓ Decide the level of protection from air sampling data. Otherwise, use RPE with an assigned protection factor (APF) of at least 20. See sheet R3. Disposable RPE is acceptable.
- ✓ Make sure all RPE is properly fit-tested - get advice from your supplier.
- ✓ Make sure that workers check their RPE works properly before use.
- ✓ Replace RPE filters as recommended by the supplier. Throw away disposable RPE at the end of the job or the end of the shift.
- ✓ Keep RPE clean.

Other protective equipment

- ✓ Provide coveralls that do not retain dust. Use synthetic fabrics - not cotton or knitted.
- ✓ Skin creams help in washing contamination from the skin. After-work creams help to replace skin oils.

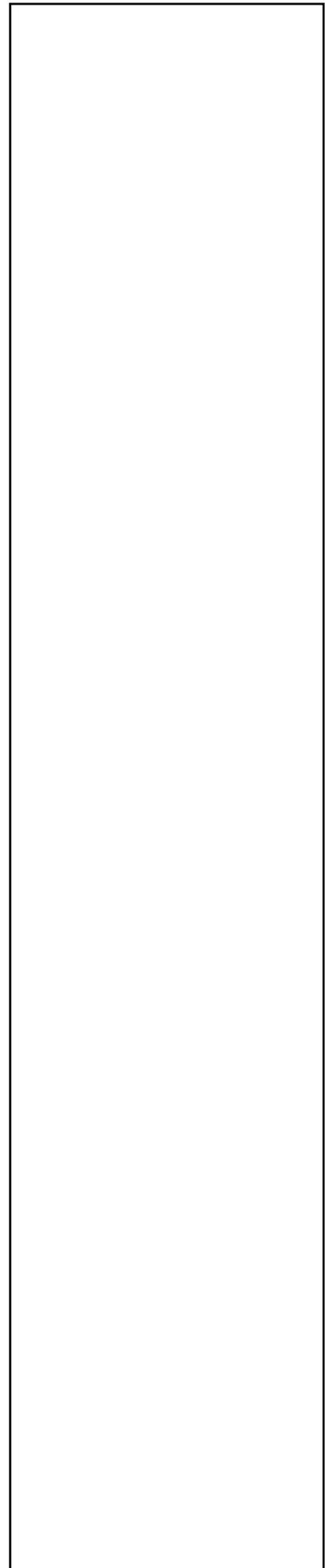
Caution: Never allow use of compressed air for removing dust from clothing.

Training and supervision

- ✓ Tell workers that silica dust can cause serious lung diseases.
- ✓ Working in the right way and using the controls correctly is important for exposure control. Train and supervise workers. See sheet CN0.

Further information

- *Respiratory protective equipment at work: A practical guide* HSG53 (Third edition) HSE Books 2005 ISBN 0 7176 2904 X
- *Silica* Construction Information Sheet CIS36(rev1) HSE Books 1999
- For environmental guidelines see sheet CN0



Useful links

- Construction trade associations may advise on health and safety consultants and training providers.
- For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk/. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.
- Contact the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) on 01332 298101 or at www.bohs.org for lists of qualified hygienists who can help you.
- Look in the Yellow Pages under 'Health and safety consultants' and 'Health authorities and services' for 'occupational health'.
- Also see www.nhsplus.nhs.uk.

Employee checklist

- Are you sure how to use all dust controls?
- Is the equipment switched off and locked off for maintenance and cleaning?
- Is the water suppression working?
- Look for signs of leaks, wear and damage every day.
- If you find any problems, tell your supervisor. Don't just carry on working.
- Make suggestions to improve the effectiveness of dust control.
- Use, maintain and store your protective equipment in accordance with instructions.
- Use skin creams provided as instructed.

This document is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/ and www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/essentials/

This document contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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