

Emergency Temporary Silica Standard What Employers Need to Know

March 6, 2024

On December 14, 2023 the Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board approved Cal/OSHA's emergency temporary standard (ETS) on respirable crystalline silica (RCS). This ETS includes important revisions to protect workers engaged in high-exposure trigger tasks (cutting, grinding, polishing, clean up, etc.) involving artificial stone and natural stone containing more than 10% crystalline silica.

"Artificial stone" is any reconstituted, artificial, synthetic, composite, engineered, or manufactured stone, porcelain, or quartz typically within a binding material. It contains more than 90% crystalline silica.

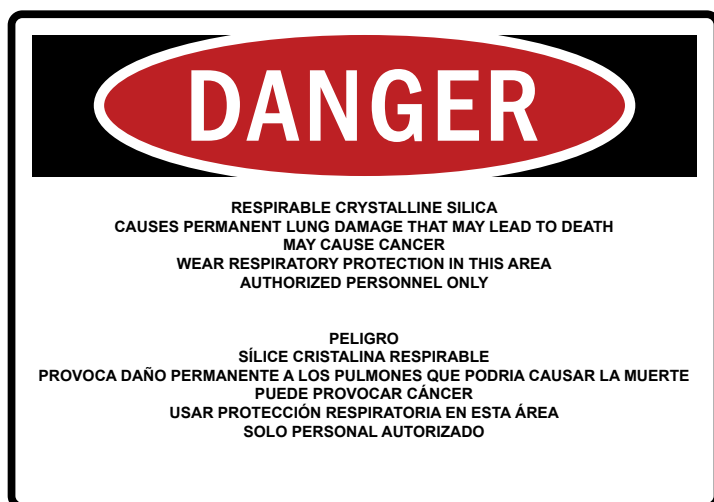
The ETS goes into effect on December 29, 2023 and makes changes to California Code of Regulations, Title 8, **section 5204** that applies to California workers occupationally exposed to RCS, except:

- Construction work covered under section 1532.3.
- Agricultural operations covered under section 3436.
- Exposures that result from the processing of sorptive clays.

Important ETS revisions employers must address include:

Additional employee exposure control precautions

- Implement methods to effectively suppress dust by ensuring running water covers the entire surface where a tool or machine contacts a work object, by one of the following methods:
 - Apply constant, continuous, and appropriate volumes of water.
 - Submerge the work object under water.
 - Water jet cutting.
- Conduct tasks in regulated areas identified by warning signs. The signage must include the following, in English and Spanish:



- Protect workers from airborne exposure during housekeeping and maintenance work by:
 - Ensuring frequent cleanup of debris to prevent dust buildup.
 - Ensuring that only wet methods or high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter vacuums are used.
 - Prohibiting dry sweeping or use of compressed air to clean off surfaces or clothing.
- Prohibit employee rotation as an exposure control.
- Prohibit walking or moving equipment through dry dust.

The ETS allows Cal/OSHA to quickly shut down an operation if work violates the ETS and endangers employees' health.

Written exposure control plan

Expand the written exposure control plan to include:

- Air monitoring records showing that engineering controls reduce employee exposure to airborne respirable silica to less than the action level.
- Procedures for the proper use of personal protective equipment.
- Documentation of proper report of carcinogen use to Cal/OSHA as required by [section 5203](#).
- Training procedures to ensure employees can prevent RCS exposures.

Employee communication and training

Ensure that employees understand the following:

- How to use the required dust control methods, including work practices and respiratory protection to prevent dust exposures.
- The health hazards and symptoms of excessive RCS airborne exposures, such as cough, difficulty breathing, fatigue, shortness of breath, weakness, fever, chest pain, or unexpected weight loss – including how crystalline silica dust can worsen the effects of smoking and tuberculosis.
- They are encouraged to seek medical attention if they think they are experiencing RCS airborne exposure-related symptoms. Early diagnosis and treatment is important.

Respirator protection

A full-face, tight-fitting powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR) or a respirator providing equal or greater protection equipped with a HEPA, N100, R100, or P100 filter must be provided for mandatory employee use. Combination organic vapor cartridges must also be used for artificial stone unless the employer demonstrates that employee exposures to any organic compounds known to be present in the artificial stone are not above the corresponding permissible exposure levels established in section 5155.

Loose-fitting PAPR, non-powered full-facepiece air-purifying respirator, or an equally protective alternative, such as a half-face PAPR may be permitted if an employer demonstrates exposures are below the action level through air monitoring every six months, unless a health care professional recommends greater protection.

Respirators must be used in accordance with an effectively implemented respirator protection program that meets the requirements of section [5144](#).

Employee exposure monitoring

Conduct employee airborne exposure monitoring at least every 12 months to ensure dust controls are working properly.

Reporting silicosis and cancer cases

Promptly (within 24 hours) report any confirmed RCS exposure-related silicosis or cancer case to [Cal/OSHA](#) and the [Department of Public Health](#).

Cal/OSHA has developed a [Model RCS Exposure Control Program](#) to help employers develop their own written program.

This guidance document is only an overview. For the full requirements, see section 5204. Also refer to the following guidance:

- [Silica Emergency Temporary Standard: Information for Workers](#)
- [Silica Emergency Temporary Standard: Information for Employers](#)



For assistance with developing a silica exposure control program, employers may contact Cal/OSHA Consultation Services at 1 800 963 9424 or InfoCons@dir.ca.gov. For Consultation information or publications, access the following link or copy the site address: www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/consultation.html
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