Silicosis Stats and Facts



FACTS

1. Silica dust is made up of small particles that become airborne during various work activities including cutting, drilling, chipping, sanding, or grinding materials that contain crystalline silica. These materials can include sand, concrete, brick, block, stone, and mortar.

2. Silicosis, an irreversible but preventable lung disease, is caused by inhalation of respirable silica dust.

3. Workers who inhale these very small crystalline silica particles are at increased risk of developing serious silica-related diseases, including:

- Silicosis, an incurable lung disease that can lead to disability and death;
- Lung cancer;
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD); and Kidney disease.
- When silica dust enters the lungs, it causes inflammation which over time leads to the development of scar tissue that makes breathing difficult.
- Cigarette smoking adds to the lung damage caused by silicosis.
- Complications from silicosis can include tuberculosis, lung cancer, chronic bronchitis, autoimmune disorders and kidney disease

4. Silica is one of the most common naturally occurring elements on the planet. Silica, the mineral compound silicon dioxide ($SiO2$), is found in two forms – crystalline or monocrystalline (also referred to as amorphous). Sand and quartz are common examples of crystalline silica.

5. A striking irony about silicosis is that while it is one of the oldest recognized occupational diseases, experts say they really don’t know how many people are suffering and dying from it today.

STATS

- Experts estimate 1 to 2 million U.S. workers are still exposed to silica.
- Approximately 2.3 million U.S. workers are exposed to silica in the workplace, including 2 million in construction and 300,000 in other industries. But the true prevalence of the disease is unknown.
- Each year, more than 250 American workers die with silicosis. There is no cure for the disease, but it is 100 percent preventable if employers, workers, and health professionals work together to reduce exposures.

- Not all cases of silicosis are fatal. Second, even in death, the disease is often undiagnosed.
- Research showed that silicosis deaths represent 4 to 8 percent of the silicosis cases per year. Which means estimates based on deaths alone miss more than 90 percent of the silicosis cases in the country.” By that calculation, some 2,500 to 5,000 silicosis cases could be occurring each year.