

OSHA proposes new rule to limit silica exposure

Last month we discussed the dangers workers in the fracturing industry face, mainly the health risks associated with silica exposure, and how current equipment does not protect workers from silica and other dangerous toxins.

Silica exposure is very hazardous yet it is still very common for construction workers in Pennsylvania and throughout the United States to be exposed to silica at work. To address the hazards of being exposed to silica, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration proposed new rules to limit silica exposure in the workplace.

Silica is a toxic mineral that can cause lung cancer, silicosis and other health ailments. Workers most commonly exposed to silica are those working in the fracturing industry and construction industry. Workers involved in sandblasting, concrete-cutting and hydraulic fracturing have the highest risk of being exposed to dangerous levels of silica.

OSHA reported that over two million U.S. workers are exposed to silica while working every year, and proposed the new rule to limit the amount of exposure workers face in an effort to reduce workplace illnesses.

The proposed rule would limit silica exposure to 50 micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air. The current limit is not specified by OSHA but it is higher than the proposed 50 micrograms. OSHA said that the proposed rule could prevent 1,600 cases of silicosis and prevent 700 workplace fatalities each year.

Despite support by medical professionals and workplace safety advocates, some industry groups are opposed to the new rule and say that current limits offer enough protection to

workers. However, if the current limit is sufficient, why are there so many cases of silicosis and lung cancer among fracturing and construction workers every year?

Construction and fracturing workers should be aware of the risks they face and encourage their employer to take steps to prevent silica and other toxic exposure in the workplace. Unfortunately, workers are not able to always reduce their exposure so it is up to OSHA and other agencies to make sure all workers are protected and free from toxic exposure.

Source: The Center for Public Integrity, "[OSHA rule targets worker exposure to silica](#)," Jim Morris, Aug. 23, 2013