Washington State Department of Labor & Industries
Division of Occupational Safety and Health

DOSH Hazard Alert

Helping employers prevent workplace injuries

August 2026

Artificial stone countertop workers are at high risk for deadly lung disease

Attention: Workers who are exposed to silica dust in the manufacturing, fabricating, finishing, or installing of artificial stone countertops.

Inhaling silica dust can be hazardous

Artificial stone (also known as quartz or engineered stone) contains high levels of crystalline silica. When this material is cut, ground, or polished, it releases extremely fine silica dust that bypasses your lungs' natural defenses and can cause rapid scarring. Inhaling this dust causes silicosis, an irreversible, incurable, and potentially fatal lung disease.

Due to an epidemic of silicosis cases that includes young workers, the Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) is issuing this hazard alert to provide ways employers can reduce the risk of worker exposure to silica. It reviews the best practices employers should use to address the exposures that are causing the epidemic, in addition to L&I's silica rule. This alert also explains how workers who are concerned about their exposure can receive a medical evaluation without having to pay a co-pay or use their personal health insurance.

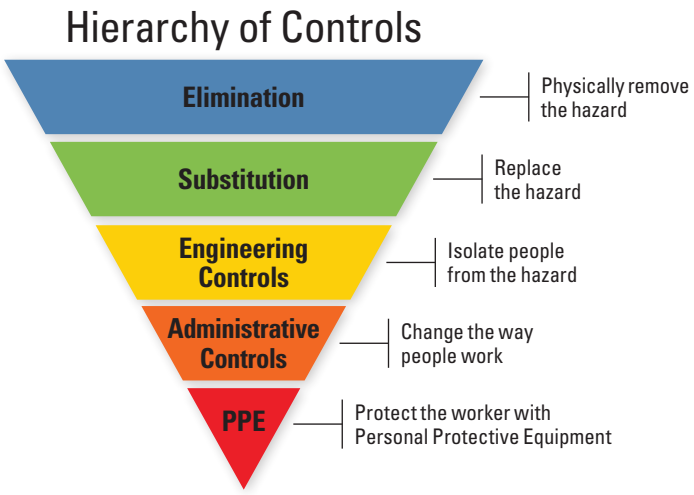
Substitution is the best way to reduce or eliminate the risk

Workers continue to develop silica-related disease, highlighting the need for prevention strategies such as substituting artificial stone with safer alternative materials. The best way to protect workers from the hazards of working with artificial stone is to stop using the engineered material altogether. L&I encourages employers to talk with manufacturers and suppliers to request silica-free countertop product lines. Also, L&I consultants can help you with substitution ideas that reduce or eliminate worker exposure to silica.

Silica exposure control plans

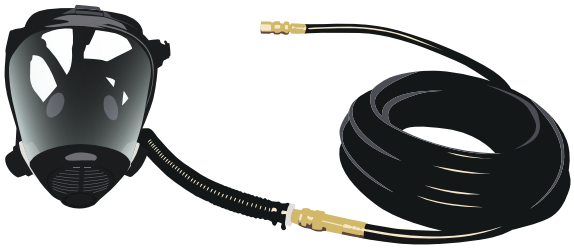
L&I consultants can help employers implement a silica exposure control plan—with the goal of reducing worker exposures as low as possible—that includes all of the following:

- **Substitution** by selecting products with no or low silica content. Less hazardous alternatives include porcelain, wood, cement, stainless steel, high-end laminate, sintered stone, lower-silica natural stone, and recycled paper composite.
- **Engineering controls** including wet methods as well as a negative pressure enclosure with adequate ventilation to keep exposures below the permissible exposure limit and as low as possible.
- **Administrative controls** including daily, ongoing and consistent housekeeping that clears dust accumulation on floors, walls, and surfaces; regulated areas; warning signs; and training needed to implement these controls. Employee rotation should not be used as a means of reducing employee exposure to silica.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** must be carefully selected and managed. It does not replace



the need to use engineering and administrative controls. For work with artificial stone, half-face elastomeric and N95 respirators are minimally protective against this hazard. The best practice for appropriate PPE selection includes properly fitted NIOSH-approved respirators with an assigned protection factor (APF) of 1000 equipped with combination cartridges that provide P100, 100P, or High Efficiency (HE) particulate filtration coupled with organic vapor protection along with disposable coveralls. Such respirators include:

  - An air-line full-facepiece respirator operated in continuous flow, or pressure-demand mode.



  - A full-facepiece tight-fitting powered air purifying respirator (PAPR).
  - A hood or helmet PAPR or air-line respirator when the respirator manufacturer has evidence of testing demonstrating an APF of 1,000 or greater.

- **Silica monitoring** by using initial and ongoing air sampling to evaluate dust-generating tasks and products, engineering controls, housekeeping, and identifying workers who need medical surveillance. The goal is to reduce employee exposure as low as possible.

Employers must ensure workers are properly trained in silica safety tailored to artificial stone work, dust-generating tasks, and the risk of rapidly developing silicosis, including training on the potential for illness to occur after only a few years of exposure. Employers must train workers to recognize silica hazards and follow safe work practices.

Encourage workers with artificial stone dust exposure to see a medical provider

Workers who currently or previously worked with artificial stone and are concerned about their exposure are encouraged to file a workers' compensation claim to receive a medical evaluation for silicosis and guidance on whether additional screening is appropriate. In most cases, L&I will cover the cost of the evaluation and diagnostic testing.

Instructions for filing a claim are available at **Lni.wa.gov/claims/for-workers/file-a-claim** or by calling 1-877-561-FILE (3453).

Workers who are exposed above the Action Level of 25 micrograms per cubic meter of respirable crystalline silica may be required to have medical surveillance made available to them at no cost and at a reasonable time and place.

Contact your nearest occupational health clinic for help. Share this information with the medical provider and refer to WAC 296-840-145 (Medical surveillance) (**app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=296-840-145**) to help the provider understand the services you need.

Report known cases of silicosis

Health care providers and the general public can notify L&I's Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) program of silicosis cases in accordance with Washington State's Notifiable Conditions rule. For more information, see **Lni.wa.gov/SHARP/ReportCases**.

How to get help

L&I Consultation

For help with product alternatives, silica monitoring, control plans, medical surveillance, and more, find your local consultant and schedule a free and confidential consultation at **Lni.wa.gov/Consultation**.

University of Washington's Field Research and Consultation Group can help with silica monitoring and a silica exposure control plan. Services are available at no cost: **deohs.washington.edu/frcg**.

Private sector industrial hygiene consultants are usually for-profit. Many, but not all, can help you with silica monitoring and more. Search for a firm near you and learn about their services.

This alert is intended to bring awareness to potential safety and health hazards in the workplace. ***It is not a rule and creates no new legal obligations.*** *L&I recommends employers and workers review the safety and health rules for specific requirements at* ***Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/topics/silica****.*

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