

#1 Free Legal Website

FindLaw.com is the leading and largest online resource for legal information. For basic legal issues to more complex ones, you'll find thousands of helpful articles, a legal community to get answers to your specific questions, an attorney directory, blogs, news, DIY forms, and much more.

Silicosis / Silica - Overview

Silica, or silicon dioxide, is a common chemical compound found in sand, rock, and soil. Since it is a naturally-occurring mineral and is often contained in a number of construction and building materials, workers in a large variety of industries and occupations may be exposed to silica and crystallized silica dust. For example, construction workers can easily be exposed to silica when chipping, hammering, drilling, crushing, or hauling rock, or when working with concrete and masonry products. Some materials containing small amounts of crystalline silica can be used in ways that produce high dust concentrations.

When silica and silica dust is inhaled, tiny particles can enter into small air sacs in the lungs. In the early 1990's, it was estimated that over one million workers in the U.S. were being exposed to this breathable (or "respirable") silica dust. Each year, more than 250 American workers die with a condition known as "silicosis." Silicosis is a chronic lung disease sometimes suffered by workers repeatedly subjected to a work environment in which silica dust is commonplace, and is the greatest health risk from silica dust exposure. Silicosis is a disease which falls under the broader name "pneumoconiosis," a general term for any lung disease caused by inhalation of dust particles.

Today, exposure to silica dust on the job is considered by the World Health Organization to be as dangerous to human health as other known carcinogens such as asbestos and smoking. People who are exposed to large amounts of silica dust are also at a greater risk of developing lung cancer, tuberculosis, and bronchitis.

What Is Silicosis?

Silicosis is a scarring and hardening of lung tissue that can result when particles of crystalline silica are inhaled. The disease can cause permanent shortness of breath, and can make victims more susceptible to further respiratory complications like bronchitis and lung cancer. In some cases, silicosis can be fatal. Unfortunately, there is no medical treatment for silicosis. It can only be prevented, not cured.

While silicosis is most likely to be contracted in such industrial jobs as sandblasting and mining, it can occur in anyone who is routinely exposed to silica dust in the air around them. Silica exposure may also occur during the use of some consumer or hobby items. No matter the source of exposure, silicosis can be broken down into three types:

Acute Silicosis - Results from exposure to a large amount of silica in a short amount of time.

Chronic Silicosis - Most commonly suffered by workers in mining, stonecutting, and similar occupations, this type of silicosis occurs most often after exposure to a fairly constant level of silica over a longer length of time, usually 7 to 10 years.

Accelerated Silicosis - Results from exposure to smaller amounts of silica over a long period of time, usually 15-20 years.

While initial exposure to silica and silica dust causes irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, silicosis itself is difficult to detect in its early stages. Frequent dry coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing, and increasing tiredness are possible early indicators of silicosis, but a person can remain free of symptoms for 10-20 years after exposure to silica dust.

Once begun, silicosis will continue to progress even if the worker has no further exposure. As it advances, an affected person experiences progressive shortness of breath, along with a steady coughing, loss of appetite, pain in the chest, and general weakness. In addition to being linked to development of respiratory disease, recent studies suggest that exposure to silica dust can keep the immune system response elevated, leading to autoimmune disease like rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, Sjogrens' syndrome, and lupus.

Get [recent news](#) on Silicosis/Silica.

Silica Exposure - Legal Remedies

If you are experiencing health problems that you believe are attributable to silica exposure, you may be entitled to compensation under the law. The facts of your particular case will dictate the identification of potentially-responsible parties and legal theories, but here are a few common examples of situations where a lawsuit might be successful:

- Employers may be legally responsible for your health problems if they failed to properly warn you of the health danger associated with silica dust exposure in the workplace, or failed to take adequate safety measures (including provision of proper safety equipment) to protect your health;
- Suppliers and Manufacturers of silica-based products, such as blasting sand, can be liable if they manufactured a product that was unreasonably unsafe or failed to meet minimum health and safety standards;
- Manufacturers of Equipment, such as machinery used in sandblasting, may be legally liable if the equipment was manufactured in a way that caused operators and fellow workers to be exposed to unreasonable amounts of silica dust;
- Manufacturers of Safety Equipment, such as respirators and dust masks, may be legally responsible if the equipment was defective and failed to function properly.

While the above examples are the most common, any situation involving potential health complications due to silica exposure is an important one to those affected. An experienced attorney will assess the facts of your particular case, and will ensure that your legal right to compensation for your injuries from silica dust exposure are fully protected.

Get Help Now

Those who must work amid silica dust should breathe as little of it as possible, using facemasks, proper ventilation, and other safety devices. Regular chest x-rays are recommended for all workers exposed to silica,, as the easiest way to detect silicosis. If discovered in its early stages, the disease can usually be halted by a change of occupation or avoidance of dust inhalation.

For legal purposes, if you or a loved one have been exposed to silica dust and are experiencing health problems, you should contact an experienced attorney for an evaluation of your legal rights, and an explanation of possible legal remedies for your injuries.

Go [here](#) to learn more about an attorney's role in a product liability case.

Click [here](#) to find an experienced product liability attorney near you.

See also:

- [Silica Exposure: Illnesses](#)
- [Silicosis/Silica: Risk and Detection](#)
- [Legal Responsibility for Toxic Exposure](#)

FINDLAW.COM EMPOWERS PEOPLE WITH TRUSTED, TIMELY AND INTELLIGENT LEGAL INFORMATION

BLOGS – FindLaw Blogs present timely news that has real-life implications, deliver important information and discuss law-related entertainment.

FINDLAW ANSWERS – A vibrant, interactive online community where everyday people can ask legal questions and get real-time answers from legal professionals and others with similar experiences.

NEWS & NEWSLETTERS – Updated throughout the day and night and covering a wide range of legal topics, FindLaw.com's News page presents current legal news, keeping people informed and educated.

FIND A LAWYER – An easy-to-search database of more than one million lawyers and law firms. It provides detailed information, enabling people to contact a qualified lawyer when they are ready.



DO-IT-YOURSELF FORMS & CONTRACTS – FindLaw.com provides accurate legal documents for common legal matters. Choose from a library of easy-to-use, low-cost, accurate legal forms for everyday legal issues.

FINDLAW VIDEO – On FindLaw.com, you'll find an online directory of more than 1,500 short videos dedicated exclusively to legal topics and attorney and law firm profiles.

Connect With Us

FindLaw.com has an entire social media team dedicated to providing our users with as many options as possible to join, participate in, and learn from the FindLaw community. Some of the social key channels are the following:



FindLaw for Consumers on Facebook

Making the law easy to access with interactive legal updates aimed at starting conversations, informing followers of their legal rights and providing a forum for questions and resources



@FindLawConsumer on Twitter

Tweeting interesting, entertaining and informative legal news everyday

HAVE A LEGAL QUESTION?
NEED TO FIND AN AFFORDABLE,
QUALIFIED ATTORNEY?

Protect yourself, your family or
your business with a legal plan
or form from LegalStreet

www.LEGALSTREET.com

Copyright © 2013 FindLaw, a Thomson Reuters business. All rights reserved. The information contained in this article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. The use and distribution of this article is subject to the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license, which can be viewed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. You must attribute the article by providing the title of the article, FindLaw copyright notice and link to the original work. You may not use the article for commercial purposes and you may not alter or transform this article in any way.

FindLaw
A Thomson Reuters Business