

## **TOOLBOX TALK #4**

### **PREVENTING SILICOSIS**



Working in many industries – including construction, mining and agriculture – involves the risk of excessive exposure to silica. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) estimates that more than 100,000 workers encounter high-risk silica exposure from routine work tasks such as sandblasting or paint removal. Repeated exposure can lead to the onset of chronic silicosis, a disease that includes symptoms such as shortness of breath, severe cough, fatigue, chest pains and fever. Additionally, silicosis may inhibit the body’s ability to fight off infections, and silica dust accumulated in the lungs can make a worker more susceptible to other illnesses.

Silicosis can go undetected for long periods of time; a chest x-ray may not indicate any kind of abnormality until 15 to 20 years after exposure. Because of this, NIOSH recommends a medical examination by a doctor specializing in lung disease before job placement and every three years thereafter.

Working in construction, you can take the steps to prevent the onset of silicosis.

NIOSH recommends:

- Reduce levels of silica dust in the workplace through engineering controls such as fans.
- Be sure the controls are properly maintained and functioning.
- Reduce dust through good work practices such as removing dust with a vacuum, hose, particle filter or wet sweeping (rather than dry).
- Consider using less hazardous materials for abrasive blasting.
- When engineering controls are inadequate, wear properly maintained respirators to limit exposure to permissible levels.
- When sandblasting, use positive pressure abrasive blasting respirators.
- Continually monitor the air in your workplace.
- Always wash your face and hands before eating and drinking.
- Change into clean clothes before leaving the worksite to prevent carrying chemicals home.