TOOLBOX TALK #11

PROPOSED CHANGES TO SILICA IN CONSTRUCTION

OSHA is currently proposing a standard to protect workers from exposure to respirable crystalline silica in construction workplaces. These exposures occur during common construction operations such as:

- Using masonry saws
- Using hand-operated grinders
- Tuckpointing
- Using jackhammers
- Using rotary hammers or drills
- Operating vehicle-mounted drilling rigs
- Milling
- Rock crushing
- Drywall finishing using silica-containing materials
- Use of heavy equipment during earthmoving

Regardless of whether or not this newly proposed standard gets implemented, contractors still need to know what to do to protect their workers from the hazards of crystalline silica. OSHA lists two very common ways to reduce and/or eliminate the hazard of breathing in silica dust. They are:

Using wet methods

The most common method of limiting silica exposures in construction tasks are wet methods, where water is used to keep silica-containing dust from getting into the air. Many gas-powered saws, a common dust producing tool, can be outfitted with a hose that can supply water to the cut either by a garden hose hook-up or with a hose connected to a portable water tank. The proposed standard features a table discussing ways to protect workers based on expected exposure.

Vacuum dust collection systems

The second method of limiting exposure is through a dust recovery or collection system. This is where the tool producing the dust is outfitted with a shroud or hood that assists in keeping the contaminant from dissipating so that the vacuum that is hooked to the shroud or hood can suck up the dust before it enters the breathing zone of the worker. And when all else does not or cannot achieve compliance, the last resort would be proper respiratory use. This must be provided as a last resort.