OSHA'S New Silica Rule - Overview and Resources

At Builders Mutual, we have been following OSHA's ruling on silica closely. Below is an overview of the ruling and a list of resources to help educate you on this important change.

On March 24, 2016, OSHA announced their final rule on Occupational Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica. The compliance date for the new rule for those in the construction industry was September 23, 2017. The new rule reduces the permissible exposure limit (PEL) for crystalline silica from 250 to 50 micrograms per cubic meter of air (µg/m3), averaged over an eight-hour shift.

Employers must use engineering controls during the course of daily operations in order to comply with the new rule. These controls include wetting down work operations, using the water flow rate recommended by the manufacturer for a tool with water controls or using local exhaust ventilation (such as vacuums) to keep silica-containing dust out of the air and out of workers' lungs. Another control method that may work well is enclosing an operation known as "process isolation." Respirators are only allowed as the sole type of protection when engineering and work practice controls cannot maintain exposures at or below the PEL or when other methods are infeasible.

For the construction industry, the standard includes Table 1, a list of common construction tasks along with exposure control methods and work practices that work well for those tasks and can be used to comply with the requirements of the standard.

Builders Mutual has compiled the following free resources to help educate our policyholders about the final rule on Occupational Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica for construction, Table 1 and ways to comply.

- **NAHB Silica in construction toolkit**
- **OSHA fact sheet**
- **OSHA Silica site: Control Measures for specific operations**
- **OSHA Small Entity Compliance Guide**
- **CPWR Silica safety website**