

OSHA's new silica standard for construction use of Fiber Cement

OSHA's new, stricter safety rules for contractors who engage in activities that create silica dust – such as cutting fiber cement – are scheduled to go into effect Sept. 23. The new rules are designed to protect construction contractors and job site workers from other trades from exposure to respirable crystalline silica, which when inhaled can lead to silicosis, lung cancer, other respiratory diseases, and kidney disease.

The new OSHA Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL) for respirable crystalline silica has been reduced to 50 micrograms per cubic meter of air, averaged over an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) work shift, down from the previous 250 micrograms for construction.

What does this mean?

Those installing fiber cement will be required to comply with the rules in 1 of 3 ways:

- Use cutting equipment that is designed to remove dust and install fiber cement siding for 4 hours or less per day, no respiratory protection is required
- Use cutting equipment that is designed to remove dust and install fiber cement siding for more than 4 hours per day, OSHA approved respiratory protection is required – except the use of handheld powers saws specifically designed for cutting fiber cement board (no respiratory protection required- others specified as well)
- Employer monitors work place exposure and relates work site, use site dust control measures and provides protection by limiting the amount of silica exposure to OSHA maximum levels. This includes monitoring work place exposure as well as offering free employee screening to monitor potential health issues because of the exposure.

What is the cost to comply?

OSHA estimates the cost to comply with the new rule to be \$540 - \$1,524 per year per company.

What are the penalties for violators?

According to OSHA, penalties for non-compliance \$12,675 per violation. Willful or repeated violation could result in a penalty of \$126,749 per violation



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