

OSHA's Proposed Silica Rule, A Serious Concern for the Natural Stone Industry According to NSC

Hollis, NH; September 12, 2013 -- On August 23, 2013, the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) released a proposal to reduce occupational exposure limits for respirable crystalline silica. Please see OSHA's Crystalline Silica Rulemaking information page at <https://www.osha.gov/silica/> for OSHA's news release, silica fact sheets, instructions for public participation, and resources.

Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) show a greater than 90 percent reduction in the silicosis mortality rate from 1968 to 2010. It is doubted that a further reduction of the allowable exposure limits will impact those numbers. Advances in wet cutting and stone industry education have positively aided OSHA in the effort to curb silica exposure during the past few years.

The proposed standard for "general industry and maritime" calls for a new crystalline silica **action level of 25 µg/m³** (micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air) averaged over an 8-hour day, and protection for workers with exposures above the **permissible exposure limit (PEL) of 50 µg/m³** for an 8-hour day. These figures represent a 50% reduction of the current limit. The Mine Safety & Health Administration (MSHA) has stated that it intends to issue a similar proposal for the mining industry later this year.

While the Natural Stone Council's (NSC) primary concern is the safety and health of the dimension stone industries' workforce, the NSC's member organizations have serious doubts that reducing the PEL will result in a significant reduction in silicosis cases. Like the Construction Industry Safety Coalition, the National Sand, Stone, & Gravel Association, and other industry associations, the NSC believes that the current limit is protective when complied with and properly enforced.

After the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) is published in the Federal Register, OSHA will accept written comments on its proposal for 90 days. It is very important that all affected businesses in each NSC member organization let OSHA know their opinions on this proposal. Comments can be submitted by: (1) visiting the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>, Docket ID# OSHA-2010-0034. (Note: The docket will open for comments when the NPRM is published in the Federal Register.); faxing OSHA's Docket Office at 202-693-1648 (for comments of 10 pages or less); or sending hard-copy documents (via regular mail, express delivery, courier, or hand delivery) to the OSHA Docket Office, Technical Data Center, Room N-2625, OSHA, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave., NW., Washington, D.C. 20210.

A NSC position statement on the proposed rule change will be submitted to OSHA during the comment period. The MSHA-OSHA Subcommittee of the NSC Regulatory Compliance Committee welcomes suggestions for the statement. Please send all suggestions to NSC Executive Director Duke Pointer at info@naturalstonecouncil.org.

About the Natural Stone Council -- Formed in 2003, the NSC unites a diverse industry of natural stone producers by bringing together the various natural stone associations to actively promote the attributes of natural stone and is funded entirely through donations. To learn more about NSC, its initiatives or to pledge support, visit www.naturalstonecouncil.org.