

June 04, 2024

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS LINDSEY P. HORVATH
AND HOLLY J. MITCHELL**

Proclaiming June 2024 as Silicosis Awareness Month

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has reported 132 silicosis cases, and counting, with over 60% reported in Los Angeles County, and the vast majority of those in the San Fernando Valley. Silicosis is a preventable lung disease caused by inhalation of respirable crystalline silica (RCS). Silica is a mineral found in nature and in materials such as sand, stone, concrete, artificial stone, and more. Cutting, grinding, chipping, sanding, drilling, finishing, or polishing of these products can release dangerous levels of silica dust into the air that workers, primarily in stone fabrication and construction occupations, can become exposed to .

Workers presenting with symptoms of silicosis are primarily Latino immigrant men between 40-49 years old with an average of 15-year work tenure cutting and fabricating stone. Silicosis typically takes 10-30 years to develop, although it can develop sooner if a person has high exposure to silica dust. Workplace exposure to crystalline silica dust causes lung inflammation, stiffening, and scarring, which can lead to severe lung disease and difficulty breathing. There is no cure besides a lung transplant, which may only extend survival on average for five years post-transplant. Additional health effects of silica dust exposure include other pulmonary diseases; chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD), malignancies, infections

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like Tuberculosis and non-tuberculous mycobacterium, autoimmune diseases, and renal disease.

On June 6, 2023, the Board unanimously approved the motion “Silicosis Prevention and Care”, which not only declared the first “Silicosis Awareness Month” in June 2023 in Los Angeles County, but also requested several reports from County departments to better understand how to address this devastating disease. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) immediately initiated outreach and education activities at stone fabrication shops.

After the reports were published, on December 19, 2023, the Board approved the “Silicosis Prevention Education” motion, in which the Board invested \$500,000 from Tobacco Settlement funds to continue silicosis prevention and intervention outreach and education, in the San Fernando Valley and throughout Los Angeles County. Additionally, the Office of Small Business, within the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity, was tasked with convening stakeholders to coordinate outreach and education strategies to stone fabrication businesses and provide resources. The Department of Mental Health (DMH) was directed to make support materials and resources available to individuals and families diagnosed with silicosis. Lastly, the Chief Executive Office Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations branch (CEO-LAIR) was also directed to continue to advocate in support of proposals at the state and federal levels that strengthen regulatory standards and enhance resources and education as it relates to silicosis.

On December 14, 2023, the Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board approved the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health’s (Cal/OSHA) emergency temporary

standards (ETS) on RCS. The ETS went into effect on December 29, 2024, and implemented stricter safety standards and protocols to prevent exposure to silica dust in stone fabrication shops, accompanied by a public awareness and education campaign. Furthermore, on March 2024, Assemblywoman Luz Rivas introduced Assembly Bill (AB) 3043, “The Silicosis Prevention Act” to maintain a public website of fabrication shops in California to track ETS compliance, and further create statewide industry standards to prohibit dry cutting of artificial stone, create a licensure program for stone fabrication shops, and require workers to undergo training.

On April 3, 2024, Los Angeles City Councilmembers Imelda Padilla, Bob Blumenfield and Monica Rodriguez co-introduced a set of motions targeting silicosis. The motions would create a mandatory wastewater permit for stone fabrication businesses, inclusion of language specifying the risks of using silica products in Building and Safety construction permits, and the creation of a public awareness campaign.

There have been considerable efforts at the state and local levels to ensure prevention and intervention initiatives to adequately tackle silicosis. Collaborative efforts among all levels of government, community, industry, and stakeholders must continue, to ensure that employers and employees in the stone fabrication industry, and community are educated on current regulations, how to prevent silicosis, and how to access needed resources. Workers need to be aware of the proper use of PPE, and when to receive screening and seek medical treatment. Stone fabrication shop owners must not only be educated on regulatory standards, but they also need support to comply. Therefore, collaborative efforts to raise awareness of silicosis and RCS prevention

strategies must continue.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

- 1) Proclaim June 2024 as Silicosis Awareness month throughout Los Angeles County .
- 2) Direct the LA County Department of Public Health (DPH) in collaboration with the LA County Department of Health Services (DHS), the LA County Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to continue partnering with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA), the City of Los Angeles, community-based organizations, stone fabrication shops, and other stakeholders to continue to educate and offer resources on the prevention and intervention of silicosis.
- 3) Direct the LA County Department of Public Works Building and Safety, in consultation with County Counsel, DPH and the City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, to include a clause in construction permits and the website about the risks of using silica products, and the appropriate use of approved equipment to protect from exposure of crystalline silica.
- 4) Direct the Chief Executive Office Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations branch (CEO-LAIR), in collaboration with DPH and DHS to continue advocating in support of Assembly Bill 3043 (Rivas), "The Silicosis Prevention Act".

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