

June 06, 2023

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

**Silicosis Prevention and Care**

Silicosis is an occupational disease caused by inhalation of crystalline silica, a common mineral found in sand, stone, concrete, and artificial stone, among other materials. Silicosis mainly affects workers exposed to silica dust in occupations such as construction and stone fabrication. An increase in silicosis cases has been noted globally in places where the manufacturing and fabrication of silica stone products has arisen. Silica particles are one hundred times smaller than a grain of sand -- the silica particles can travel deep into the lungs, causing scarring that continues even after exposure stops. Silicosis is an incurable lung disease that can lead to disability and death. Silica dust can also cause lung cancer, kidney disease, and autoimmune disease.

Since January 2016, Los Angeles County has identified 49 cases, the highest numbers of silicosis cases in the State and in the nation. At least 30 of the 69 total Statewide patients have been diagnosed with an accelerated form of silicosis, an incurable and deadly illness caused by occupational exposure to silica dust associated with stone fabrication processes. Most of these cases have tragically occurred in men in their thirties and forties, causing illness and death early in life, leaving families devastated. California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), at Cal/OSHA, enforces a set of workplace safety regulations known as the General

MOTION

SOLIS

MITCHELL

HORVATH

BARGER

HAHN

Industry Silica Standard, and disseminates guidance, prevention tips and fact sheets for employers and employees on how to comply with this standard and to protect employee's health.

In 2019, Cal/OSHA launched a "special emphasis program" for silica and inspected 106 workplaces and found overexposures at 47 of those workplaces. Silicosis typically occurs after 15-20 years of occupational exposure to silica. Symptoms may or may not be obvious; therefore, workers need to have a chest x-ray to determine if there is lung damage. At this late stage, silicosis is irreversible and a terminal disease. Those suffering from silicosis are also at an increased risk, due to their illness, of contracting other serious diseases such as lung cancer, mycobacterial infections, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and rheumatological diseases.

There is no cure for silicosis because the lung damage cannot be reversed. Treatment aims to relieve symptoms and improve quality of life; however, the condition may continue to get worse, leading to further lung damage and serious disability, including the need for a lung transplant, which has costly impacts to the healthcare system in addition to the human toll.

Many workers afflicted by this condition seek medical care after it is too late, resulting in a high mortality rate. Prevention is only one tool to combat this disease, so early diagnosis and treatment are very important. Many people who don't have health insurance are not proficient in English, fear immigration repercussions, and often don't seek medical care until they are very sick, which is often fatal. However, starting Jan 1, 2024, all Californians will be eligible for full-scope Medi-Cal, irrespective of immigration status. It is vital that the County continue

educating impacted individuals on how to access Medi-Cal coverage in a culturally, linguistically, and immigration appropriate manner so they get diagnosed and are treated as early as possible.

This motion endeavors to promote awareness of the health risks to stone-fabrication workers in Los Angeles County and in California and encourages compliance at stone-fabricator sites with existing State and federal regulations and education of workers and health care providers about the dangers of silica exposure. Cal/OSHA has taken steps to educate employers about how to improve the safety of their workplaces and is committed to investigating and enforcing existing regulations around silica exposure. Los Angeles County can play an important role both in supporting the State's efforts and taking local action.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Proclaim the month of June as "Silicosis Awareness Month" throughout Los Angeles County to raise awareness of the negative health effects of silica.
2. Direct the Department of Public Health (DPH), in consultation with the Department of Health Services (DHS), Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA), Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), and Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), in collaboration with State and community partners, to report back in 120 days on outreach and education plans targeting stone fabricators, employees in the industry, impacted communities, and consumers, regarding the health risks associated with silica-fabricated stone. The report should include:
  - a. The development of targeted multilingual outreach and education materials and

messaging to be distributed via media and physical outreach to the various groups.

b. Outreach efforts, including, but not limited to communications activities in partnership with DCBA's Office of Labor Equity and Office of Immigrant Affairs, the use of Promotoras, and in collaborations.

c. Strategies to engage workers in the stone industry to understand risks and protective measures and to get screened and receive treatment if symptomatic. Further to offer support services where applicable, including, but not limited to, linkage to public assistance and social services programs, Healthcare enrollment, and linkage to employment opportunities.

d. Collaboration with the California Department of Public Health, DOSH, Cal/OSHA, DCBA's Office of Labor Equity and others as appropriate on the outreach strategy and efforts to engage stone fabricator businesses to provide information and ensure compliance with existing standards and regulations.

3. Direct the Department of Public Works, in collaboration with the Internal Services Department, LA County Departmental facilities management staff, and others, and in consultation with County Counsel, to report back in 45 days with recommendations concerning the Board potentially enacting a County ban on the future use, specification, or purchase of silica engineered stone on all County capital projects by all County departments, which should include guidance that any fabrication and installation of already purchased silica stone should only be done by the County and contractors following best

practices and State guidance, in consultation with DPH.

4. Direct DPH, in collaboration with DEO, DHS, DCBA, and in consultation with County Counsel, to report back in 90 days on the options to ban the sale, fabrication, and installation of silica fabricated stone in LA County. The report should include a plan to educate and advise businesses, with options for the use of other construction materials with less health risks to workers. The report should also include an outreach and engagement plan for DEO: 1) to provide guidance to businesses who might be affected by the ban of sale of silica engineered stone in unincorporated LA County, and provide them with grant, loan and technical assistance; including outreach to transitioning businesses for worker-ownership opportunities, and rapid reemployment and training, and 2) to provide support for workers for rapid reemployment and training opportunities.

5. Direct the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office of Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations, in collaboration with LA County Counsel, DPH, and DHS to report back in 60 days on legislative and regulatory advocacy options at the State and federal levels to educate regarding the health risks associated with the use of silica-fabricated stone, strengthening regulatory enforcement, and banning the product.

# # #