

SILICA DUST

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Silica Dust

Cutting and installing fibre cement products in the housing construction industry, providing the prescribed safety measures are strictly adhered to, has low exposure to silica dust. The current permissible exposure limit for respirable dust containing crystalline silica for the construction industry in America, as defined by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), is 0.05 mg/m³, measured by millions of particles per cubic metre as a weighted average over an eight hour working day.

According to Union Safe Australia, among others, the exposure limit for silica dust (respirable quartz) is less than that at 0.01 mg/m³. James Hardie has carried out exhaustive tests over two programs for internal staff and end users, where they monitored a worker continuously cutting fibre cement, inside, for eight hours while wearing PPE. The monitors showed that the worker was exposed to less than this acceptable limit.

As most contractors do not cut fibre cement continuously nor are they in a contained area, their exposure to silica dust is low and well below the acceptable limit . . . PROVIDING THEY ADHERE TO THE PRESCRIBED SAFETY MEASURES AND WEAR PPE.

We need, none the less to to be continually aware that silica is a health issue and you must all be vigilant in following through best safety practices. An analogy could be that if we wear a hat and sunscreen and are not continuously in the sun we are unlikely to get skin cancer.

However, excessive continuous exposure to sun over a long period of time without sunscreen, hats and glasses increases the risk of melanoma. To reiterate the obvious safety measures:

1. When cutting fibre cement make sure you wear PH dust masks (provided) and safety glasses.
2. Ensure when you are cutting, that the dust is blowing away from your breathing zone and not towards it.
3. Use approved dust reducing circular saws with vacuum bags.

Hebel

Cutting fibre cement creates a coarse dust, but cutting Hebel creates a finer dust. Therefore use greater care in selecting the cutting area so that dust is isolated in one area away from the workface.

Waste should not be left on scaffolds. CSR also recommends that you observe good personal hygiene by washing hands and removing dusty clothing and PPE before eating. In addition to this, it is sensible to warn others to stay clear of cutting areas when in use or to wear their PPE.

To further reduce risk, you can change out of your work gear or remove your overalls before you travel home to avoid exposure in a confined space (your car) to residual dust. Please remember you too have personal responsibility for your health and safety.

If you have any queries about workplace safety issues, please contact the office (Norma, Kalai or Sandy).