

MSHA: Silica Review – What is Happening?

I just performed a quick review of where MSHA stands concerning developing a new Silica standard. At this time there is no momentum from MSHA to revise the standard. I do not foresee this changing in the near future considering the present administration that is running the country. This might change after the next election.



MSHA intends to use OSHA's work on the health effects and risk assessment, adapting it as necessary for the mining industry. This rulemaking would improve health protection from that afforded by the existing standards. They intended to use OSHA's risk assessment and peer review of the scientific literature that had already been done by OSHA in formulating its rule. MSHA will consider alternative methods of addressing miners' exposures based on the capabilities of the sampling and analytical methods.

What do you do now? Wait for the new rule? Prudent managers will continue to focus on limiting workplace exposures to silica and complying with MSHA's existing rules. I imagine that MSHA is enforcing the current rule to emphasize the importance of reducing exposure to silica. Facilities should study the New OSHA Silica standard and familiarize themselves with OSHA's expectations regarding silica. This will help your facility be prepared once MSHA develops its own rule.

MSHA has not said previously what the final exposure cap would be, but noted that the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has recommended a 50 ug/m³ exposure limit to respirable crystalline silica in mining.

In conclusion, I recommend that all facilities keep up with the existing silica regulations. Make sure you are in full compliance with the regulations. Study the OSHA silica regulations and be ready to adopt these regulations as the MSHA regulation is most likely to mirror it. MSHA is probably years away from implementing a new silica standard but



should you just wait? Waiting is ok but what is best for your company and your employees? Reducing or eliminating silica exposures is the right thing to do. Keep working on how to reduce silica exposures at your facilities.

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