



HANDLE STONES WITH CARE

A CornerStone Initiative

to Cut Workers Exposure from Silica

Manifesto of the Initiative

Introduction

Handle Stones with Care is a voluntary initiative promoting guidelines to protect workers from exposure to respiratory crystalline silica.

Exposure to respiratory crystalline silica occurs during the fabrication and installation processes of stone products containing silica when the adequate safety measures are lacking. It is therefore an occupational challenge that needs to be addressed in order to protect workers from respiratory disease. This initiative is re-establishing guidelines and best practices to help employers and workers to comply with existing regulations across countries, with the objective of taking important steps towards a transition to the safest techniques and equipment used to cut, grind and polish stone surfaces.

In a nutshell, we believe this initiative will optimise the implementation of the steps different regulators have taken in the past decades to minimize the risks of workers' exposure to respirable crystalline silica. It will be a repository for state of the art techniques and it also aims at gathering ideas, input and collaboration from stakeholders to further improve the protection of workers.

Unlocking Best Practices

Industry has acknowledged the concerns associated with respirable crystalline silica and deeply regrets the continued spreading of respiratory diseases linked to it. In this regard, safety of workers is at the core of industry's activities and, hence, we fully support the steps taken by regulators across continents to prevent exposure from it for workers. However, the guidelines are not aimed at replacing existing regulations. Instead, their objective is to complement existing standards put forward by regulators and support employers to comply with existing regulations. Ultimately, the guidelines aim at protecting workers by using adequate equipment, such as water-integrated machinery or respiratory protective equipment in order to control personal exposure to respirable crystalline silica dust

in workplace. They are applicable to all kind of stone fabrication industries, whereby the risk of work exposure to respirable crystalline silica represents a concern.

What measures we are taking?

Over the past years, industry has moved forward proactively with the commitment to have measures in place to prevent occupational exposure from respirable crystalline silica dust, such as the **development of safety data sheets and product warnings** or through other **educational measures** to promote the safe manufacturing and use of the products.

Now, the industry is putting forward **three individual guidelines - task sheets** covering three essential aspects to improve workers protection. The guidelines aim to provide good practice guidance for work procedures, protective equipment and equipment dedicated to reducing the level of respirable crystalline silica when cutting, grinding or polishing stone surfaces. These individual guidelines aim to minimize the level of worker's exposure by making use of specific technologies to promote a healthy, risk free environment.

1. Use of water-integrated machinery & tools at the stone fabrication plant:

The use of this equipment significantly reduces the level of respirable crystalline silica. This sheet provides good practice guidance for processing slabs containing crystalline silica using water-integrated CNC machines, manual saws and manual tools (used after initial cutting). It provides an employee checklist for making best use of the controls.

2. Safe installation of countertops: Protecting installers while installing countertops is key to reduce exposure. The task-sheet covers the phase of pre-installation, the use of tools on site (e.g. encouraging the use of water-integrated tools), and the post installation phase (e.g. cleaning of dust residues). It provides good practice guidance for work procedures, personal protective equipment and equipment dedicated to significantly reducing the level of respirable crystalline silica when cutting, grinding or polishing stone surfaces (e.g., engineered stone, natural stone or porcelain) at the installation site (e.g., consumer's home) and for providing better services to the final end user. In general, if no cutting, grinding, sanding or polishing of the countertop is performed during installation, no respirable crystalline silica should be released.

3. Use of respiratory Protective Equipment for the slab industry: The use of respiratory protective equipment is critical to workers safety and drastically reduces the risk of being exposed to dust. This task sheet provides good practice guidance use of RPE in all parts of the fabrication plant, installation sites and related work areas to increase worker protection from respirable crystalline silica. Practical, day-to-day issues that are crucial for employer safety are presented in a simple yet comprehensive way. These include: when to use a half face respirator, when to use a disposable mask, when to use Powered Air Purifying

Respirators (PAPR), but also tips on how to properly run the maintenance of such equipment.

A Call for Support

Industry has been working with relevant stakeholders , to provide easy-to-use solutions to the issues caused by respiratory crystalline silica. In this spirit of a constructive dialogue and a proactive solution-minded approach, this voluntary initiative aims to address a wide call to all stakeholders with an interest of the issues to join. Only through cooperation, innovation and responsible action will solutions be put forward to address the issues caused by the processing of products containing silica, while safeguarding the numerous beneficial properties of such products for society.

For more information, please contact:

Beatrice Barbiero
Director, AStA Worldwide
info@astaworldwide.com