

Silica Exposure in General Industry

Housekeeping 5-Minute Talk

Overview of topic

All general industry employers covered by the silica standard must avoid certain housekeeping practices.

When cleaning up dust that could contribute to employee exposure to silica, employers must:

- Not allow dry brushing or dry sweeping, unless methods such as wet sweeping and HEPA-filtered vacuuming are not feasible
- Not allow cleaning of surfaces or clothing with compressed air, unless the compressed air is used together with a ventilation system that effectively captures the dust cloud or no other cleaning method is feasible

Employers are required to use other cleaning methods such as wet sweeping and HEPA-filtered vacuums, whenever feasible, because such methods reduce employee exposures by preventing silica-containing dust from getting into the air.

Feasibility of cleaning methods

In a very limited number of cases, cleaning methods such as wet sweeping or HEPA-filtered vacuums may not be safe or effective. When wet methods or HEPA-filtered vacuuming would not be effective, would cause damage, or would create a hazard in the workplace, the employer is not required to use these cleaning methods.

However, even in cases where one of those cleaning methods may not be safe or effective, employers could often use another acceptable method for cleaning. For example, if it is not feasible to wet sweep near electrical equipment, a HEPA-filtered vacuum could be used for cleaning.

Therefore, situations in which no acceptable cleaning methods can be used are expected to be very rare. In those rare cases where the employer needs to use cleaning methods such as dry sweeping, dry brushing, or compressed air, the employer must be able to show why cleaning methods that decrease employee exposures are not feasible

Training tips: Discuss your housekeeping procedures.

Where to go for more information: 29 CFR 1910.1053(h)—Housekeeping

