The Truth about Crystalline Silica in Clay…

What is silica? Crystalline silica is one of the most frequently occurring materials on earth and its most common form is sand.

What are the new silica rules by OSHA all about? OSHA has regulated the amount of dust containing crystalline silica for decades as a respiratory hazard, but the new rule increases the regulation in this area when workplaces contain high levels of certain kinds of respirable crystalline silica.

What kind of silica is OSHA particularly concerned about? OSHA's regulation recognizes that silica particles that aren't small enough to be airborne are not a problem (otherwise sand beaches would be off limits without wearing full respirators). It also recognized that certain forms of silica (for example, "amorphous silica" and silica in clay materials) are not the serious issue. OSHA has determined that hazardous issues are created when silica is freshly fractured (like in sandblasting or rock cutting operations) or right after it is high heated (like in brick and ceramics plants).

Are the new silica rules why you have a warning on floor absorbent packaging? We are required by law to alert you (through labeling) to the presence of crystalline silica in our products, but all of our products have been thoroughly tested in their intended uses and are safe to use. (People have been safely using clay-based floor absorbent and cat litter for decades.) Indeed, OSHA's recent rules on silica dust exempted clay plant employees from higher standards because there is no evidence that clay dust is as hazardous as other silicas.

What is a "high level" of respirable crystalline silica? The focus of the OSHA regulations are extremely dusty environments, such as minerals processing, concrete work, rock cutting or sandblasting. Sweeping up of a typical warehouse floor or dust created by drilling a hole in a concrete wall does not by itself raise issues with the new (or the old) regulation of silica dust. Specifically, OSHA has stated that an employer needs to address crystalline silica in the workplace only if an employee is subject to 25 micrograms per cubic meter of air (25 µg/m3) as an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) under any foreseeable conditions.

We have conducted tests to calculate the average dust exposure when working with clay absorbents. Our calculation shows that **a worker using clay absorbents over an 8 hour shift would – in the worst case-- be exposed to less than 1/4000 of the Standard's minimum.** In short, use of clay absorbents is irrelevant for determining if the OSHA regulation will apply to the workplace.

I know that Oil-Dri is made out of clay. Is using Oil-Dri to clean up a mess an issue under the regulations? When you pour Oil-Dri on a spill, only a negligible amount of dust is created, and only a small portion of that dust is crystalline silica within clay, which OSHA has recognized carries less risk than other forms of silica. Furthermore, cleaning up the spill covered by Oil-Dri is even less dusty once the Oil-Dri is wet.

How does the new OSHA rule impact our sweeping up in our workplace? The rule highlights the fact that any dry sweeping creates dust, and any dust is not lung friendly. Initially, OSHA was planning to regulate dry sweeping of workplaces where crystalline silica was present. In its final regulations, it clarified that it was only regulating environments with 25 µg/m3) as an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA), and even there dry sweeping was allowed if wet sweeping was not an option.

Even if the OSHA rule doesn't apply, what is the best way to sweep up dusty materials? Oil-Dri Sweeping Compound effectively traps debris when pushed in front of a broom and prevents dust from becoming airborne and resettling. This results in a cleaner floor and prevents the inhalation of irritable dust while sweeping. Available in four formulas, Oil-Dri Sweeping Compound comes brightly colored in red or green for spot-free sweeping.

If my workplace has high levels of crystalline silica, does that impact what sweeping practices I should follow? If your workplace is covered by the new OSHA Crystalline Silica rules, you should certainly consider using a sweeping method other than dry sweeping. Oil-Dri's sweeping products provide you with that option.