AWPA
American Wire Producers Association
PO Box 151387
Alexandria, VA 22315

OSHA FINALIZES CRYSTALLINE SILICA RULE

IMPACT:

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) finalized its workplace exposures standard for crystalline silica for general industry that would sharply reduce the existing permissible exposure limit (PEL). The rule lowers the PEL from the current standard of 100 micrograms per cubic meter to 50 micrograms of silica per cubic meter. It gives industries two years to come into compliance. The rule also requires covered facilities to implement a wide variety of administration and engineering controls, including requirements for initial and periodic exposure assessments, regulated and restricted work areas, engineering and work practice exposure controls, respiratory protection, employee medical surveillance, employee training and recordkeeping. Specifically, the rule requires employers to develop a written exposure control plan. In addition, OSHA's final rule mandates a hierarchy of control measures requiring installation of engineering and workplace controls over the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as respirators and it continues to bar job rotation as a method of attaining compliance with the new PEL.

Silica is classified as part of the "silicate" class of minerals, which includes compounds that are composed of silicon and oxygen and which may also be bonded to metal ions or their oxides. Crystalline silica is used in industry in a wide variety of applications. For example, silica sand is used to form molds for metal castings in foundries and in abrasive blasting operations. There are over 30 major industries and operations where exposures to crystalline silica can occur.

Among some of the specific requirements of this rule are the following:

- Scope: The standards cover all occupational exposures to respirable crystalline silica.

- Written exposure rule: The final rule includes a requirement for employers covered by the rule to develop a written exposure control plan and the means of implementing that plan. This plan must include procedures used to restrict access to work areas, when necessary, to minimize the numbers of employees exposed to respirable crystalline silica and their level of exposure.

- Medical surveillance: The final rule requires that medical surveillance be made available to employees exposed to respirable crystalline silica at or above the action level for 30 or more days per year.

To get more information or read the rule in its entirety, follow this link: https://www.osha.gov/silica/.