

Toolbox Talk

Construction Dust



Construction dust is not just a nuisance, it can seriously damage your health and some types can eventually even kill you. Regularly breathing these dusts over a long time can therefore cause life-changing lung disease. It is the very small particles (that can't be seen) that enter lungs and cause disease.

Types of Dust:

- Silica dust—created when working on silica-containing materials such as concrete, mortar and sandstone.
- Wood dust—created when working on softwood, hardwood and wood-based products like MDF and plywood.
- Lower toxicity dusts—created when working on materials containing little or no silica, such as gypsum (in plasterboard), limestone, marble and dolomite.
- Wind-blown dust—may contain many types of dust.



Health Risks:

The main dust-related diseases affecting construction workers are;

- Lung cancer
- Silicosis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Most of these diseases take a long time to develop and dust can build up in the lungs and harm them over time.

Control the Risk:

Stop or reduce the dust; look at ways of stopping or reducing the amount of dust, use different materials, less powerful tools or other work methods.

Control the dust; stop the dust getting into the air.

- Water damps dust clouds, but needs to be used correctly during the whole time the task is being carried out. Water cannot be used on electric tools or on wood.
- On-tool extraction removes dust as it is being produced.

Respiratory protective equipment (RPE); water or extraction may not reduce exposure enough and respiratory protection needs to be provided as well. It should be adequate for the amount of dust and type of work, should fit the user and be worn correctly. Anyone using tight fitting masks will need to be clean shaven. **Remember:** RPE is the last line of protection.

Assess the Risk:

High dust levels are caused by;

- Task—high energy tools such as brick saws.
- Work area—the more enclosed the higher build-up of dust.
- Time—more dust is created the longer the work takes.
- Frequency—regularly doing the task increases the risk.