

**NORTHWEST  
LABOR  
PRESS**

(International Standard Serial Number 0894-444X)

Established in 1900 in Portland, Oregon as a voice of the labor movement. Published on a semi-monthly basis on the first and third Fridays of each month by the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Co. Inc., a non-profit mutual benefit corporation owned by 20 unions and councils including the Oregon AFL-CIO. Serving more than 120 union organizations in Oregon and Southwest Washington.

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Printed on recycled paper, using soy-based inks, by members of Teamsters Local 747-M.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** Individual subscriptions are \$13.75 per year for union members, \$20 a year for all others. Send a check for that amount, indicating mailing address and union affiliation, to P.O. Box 13150, Portland, OR 97213. For 25 or more subscriptions, group rates of \$9.60 a year per person are available to trade union organizations. Call 503-288-3311 for details.

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# ...Silica rule: Use water, vacuum, or a respirator

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done to control dust for each task, like a vacuum hose or water that goes directly to where the silica dust is generated. If employers follow those methods, they don't have to collect air samples, give employee medical exams, or take other measures.

"In the construction industry, it's very simple," says Chris Trahan, top worker safety expert for North America's Building Trades Unions. "You wet it down. You suck it up. If you control the dust at the source, you're done. You don't have to do anything else."

Trahan, an industrial hygienist and former OSHA compliance officer, says the new silica rule will make a huge impact on the construction environment: "You're not going to walk down the street and see plumes of dust when construction workers are cutting the curb or sidewalk."

"We're going to see a reduction in disease," Trahan said. "[Diseases of the lung] are a huge issue for construction workers, and our research has shown over and over again that silica is a major contributor."

In construction, the unions

whose members are most affected include Laborers, Operating Engineers, and Bricklayers and Allied Crafts (BAC). Fittingly, OSHA announced the rule at BAC's national training center in Bowie, Maryland. But plenty of other building trades workers will benefit. On construction sites, anyone who breathes in the dust or sweeps it up is at risk — not just the workers who grind and cut.

"The biggest thing you're going to see is less dust," said Bricklayers Executive Vice President Gerard Scarano. "You're also going to find better educated workers who know more about the hazard and the tools they need to use."

The rule takes effect June 23, but OSHA is giving employers a grace period to figure out how to comply. It won't begin enforcing the rule for a year in the construction industry, two years in general industry, and five years in the fracking industry.

But responsible employers are already taking measures to reduce silica. The Labor Press will happily list the names of any local union-signatory contractor that is already complying with the OSHA silica standard.



**WHAT'S MISSING FROM THESE PICTURES? DUST.** Bricklayers Local 1 apprentice Krista Kiser, above, grinds a mortar joint with a vacuum attached. Below, her fellow apprentice Tristan Burke operates a brick saw with a water hose attachment. On Page 1, apprentice Robert Griggs operates the same brick saw without the water — generating the dust that causes silicosis.



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