

# **Pennsylvania Workers Warned about Exposure to Silica**

Fracking is becoming more and more common throughout the United States, as new sources of oil and gas are being discovered. Many of these deposits are located in difficult to reach places, meaning that extensive effort is needed to extract the resources. For some workers, this can mean exposure to dangerous materials that may lead to workplace illnesses.

Companies use fracking to reach the deposits that are beyond the reach of traditional well equipment. Workers inject pressurized water and sand through the ground, hoping to break up the rock that is surrounding the minerals. One of these materials has led to a special hazard alert being issued for fracking workers.

Problems arise because of the airborne materials that may be present while the fracking is ongoing. Silica, the fine sand used in fracking, is most concerning to regulators. Workers come into contact with silica at several stages during the fracking process.

The silica is often hauled to the region in open trucks, which allows for it to become airborne. When it is placed into equipment to be used during fracking, this again can lead to exposure. This can impact the air quality of the entire worksite, and lead to serious health problems for workers. Those with prolonged contact with silica may end up developing silicosis, which may lead to lung cancer or other serious health problems.

The new alert calls for new protections to be put in place for workers. Employers and companies are being asked to put additional procedures and equipment in place that can help

limit exposure. Focused training may be needed for certain workers, and some workers may need to be monitored for any health issues if they have constant contact with silica.

Source: EHSToday.com "[OSHA and NIOSH Tackle Fracking Hazards for Workers](#)" Sandy Smith, June 25, 2012.