

CEMENT/CONCRETE SAFETY

SAFETY TOOL BOX TALK

What's in cement/concrete that can be harmful?

Different cements have different ingredients. Many of them contain substances that can be hazardous, like silica, lime, gypsum, nickel, cobalt, and chromium compounds.

What illnesses can you get if you breathe too much cement dust?

- Chronic bronchitis.
- Silicosis? from the crystalline silica (quartz) used in many cements.
- Cancer - from the small amounts of chromium compounds found in some cements.

What are the symptoms of silicosis?

Acute silicosis can occur after a few weeks of very high exposure (for example, in sandblasters). Symptoms are shortness of breath, coughing, fever, and weight loss.

Chronic silicosis is rarely seen in workers with less than ten years of exposure. It permanently damages your lungs.

Silicosis also increases your chance of getting tuberculosis.

Is it dangerous if you get cement dust or wet cement on your skin?

Yes. Getting cement dust or wet cement on your skin can cause burns, rashes, and other kinds of skin irritation. Lime, found in most cements, is often the cause. Some workers slowly become allergic to cement if they have skin contact with it over a long period of time.

Cement dust and wet cement can also irritate your eyes.

How can you find out the ingredients in the particular cement you're using?

If you can, get a bag and check the label. You may find a list of ingredients, a safety warning, or both.

Read the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for the product. MSDSs are required by law. They'll tell you the ingredients and possible health hazards. Everyone working on the site has a right to see MSDSs.

How can you protect yourself from breathing cement and concrete dust?

Stay out of dusty areas if you can and wet down the work to keep dust out of the air.

What are some things you can do to protect your skin and eyes from cement?

- Don't get wet or dry cement on your skin or in your eyes. If you do, immediately wash it off with a lot of water.
- Wear goggles, or safety glasses with side shields, to protect yourself from splashes.
- Wear boots and other protective clothing if necessary.
- Wear gloves. Use a type which are impermeable, the cement can't get through them. Leather or cloth work gloves won't protect you.

