

Silicosis in Stone Countertop Workers: Regulatory Update and Proposed Legislation

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The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) recently reported its first confirmed case of silicosis associated with occupational exposure in the stone countertop industry and in response, issued a safety alert.¹ The case involved a man in his 40s employed by two stone countertop fabrication and installation companies in Massachusetts. While a fabricator, the man cut and shaped quartz, granite, marble, and porcelain. The man described workplace conditions at the first company, where he worked for 12 years, as very dusty; that wet methods were not routinely used; and he only received thin surgical masks for dust protection while performing his duties.

Silicosis

Silicosis is a progressive lung disease caused by inhaling crystalline silica, found naturally in granite and other stones. Historically, silicosis was associated with individuals working in mines, but the disease has become prevalent among stone fabrication workers following the increased popularity of stone countertops. Processes like cutting, polishing, or grinding stone may generate respirable silica dust.² In sufficient dose, silica dust particles may become trapped in lung tissue, causing inflammation and scarring, thereby reducing the lungs' ability to take in oxygen.

The first reported case of silicosis in the US associated with exposure to silica dust from engineering stone was identified in Texas in 2014. Additional cases have been identified in other states, particularly in California.

Regulatory Control of Silica

Although there is currently no cure for silicosis, it is preventable through proper workplace controls. In 2016, the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) updated relevant rules governing permissible levels of exposure to crystalline silica. In 2018, OSHA's Respirable Crystalline Silica standards for General Industry and Maritime went into full effect. Among other things, employers became required to assess employee exposures to silica if it may be at or above an action level of 25 µg/m³ (micrograms of silica per cubic meter of air), averaged over an 8-hour day. OSHA also set a permissible exposure limit (PEL) of 50 µg/m³, averaged over an 8-hour day.³

Proposed Bill

H.R. 5437, the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Stone Slab Products Act, 119th Cong. (2025) (introduced Sept. 17, 2025), would prohibit civil actions brought against a manufacturer or seller of a stone slab product for harm resulting from the alteration of such a product by a fabricator, and for other purposes.⁴ On January 14, 2026, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property, Artificial Intelligence, and the Internet held a hearing on the bill. The hearing, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Protecting the US Stone Slab Industry from Lawfare," examined the problem of and potential legislative solutions to abusive litigation, arising out of unlawful workplace practices of unscrupulous third parties, against US manufacturers and distributors of stone slab products that contribute \$30 billion to the US economy and employ well over 100,000 workers.⁵

Conclusion

The DPH recent report and proposed bill should remind employers to audit their current practices and make necessary adjustments.

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1 Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Massachusetts Public Health Officials Issue Safety Alert to Employers After State's First Confirmed Silicosis Case in Stone Countertop Industry (Dec. 9, 2025), <https://www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-public-health-officials-issue-safety-alert-to-employers-after-states-first-confirmed-silicosis-case-in-stone-countertop-industry>.

2 NIOSH Science Blog, Outbreak of Silicosis among Engineered Stone Countertop Workers in Four States (Oct. 29, 20219), <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2019/10/29/silicosis-countertop/>.

3 Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Silica, Crystalline—General Industry and Maritime (last visited Dec. 16, 2025), <https://www.osha.gov/silica-crystalline/general-industry-maritime>.

4 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Stone Slab Products Act, H.R. 5437, 119th Cong. (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/5437/text>

5 US House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Protecting the US Stone Slab Industry from Lawfare (Jan. 14, 2026), <https://judiciary.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/between-rock-and-hard-place-protecting-american-stone-slab-industry>