

FAQ

ONTARIO SILICA CONTROL TOOL™

On Accessing and Registering

1. How can I access the tool?

The tool is available on preventoccdisease.ca.

2. What information do I need to register for the Ontario Silica Control Tool™?

Key pieces of information needed to register for the tool is the Employer's WSIB Number, and the Company's legal name. You can find your WSIB account number on any document sent to you by the MLITSD.

To create an account [click here](#).

3. What is my company's legal name?

Often, companies registered with the MLITSD have both a legal and an 'operating' name. The Ontario Silica Control Tool™ database will show only the registered legal name, which may be different from the more commonly used operating name. You can find your legal company name on any documents sent to you by MLITSD.

4. What if I am not a construction employer in Ontario, but still want access?

The tool is a resource that is free for all construction employers in Ontario. In the event you are not a construction-based employer, your WSIB Account number will not be recognized by the tool. In this case, you would have to reach out to the developers of the Ontario Silica Control Tool™ to obtain access. Please note that this request may take up to 10 business days to process.

[Follow this link here](#) if you are a constructor/worker or worker rep without a WSIB account.

5. Can I access the Ontario Silica Control Tool™ on my mobile device?

Yes, the tool can be operated from your mobile device, and you can run it like an app.

Follow these instructions if using an **iPhone/iPad**:

After registering to use the tool using the blue button above/below:

1. Open the [Ontario Silica Control Tool™](#) homepage using the browser on your phone.
2. At the bottom of the screen, tap the share icon (square with an upward arrow).
3. From the share options, tap **Add to Home Screen**.
4. From the **Add to Home Screen** pop-up, tap **Add** in the top right corner.

Follow these instructions if using an **Android**:

After registering to use the tool using the blue button above/below:

1. Open the Ontario Silica Control Tool™ homepage using the browser on your phone.
2. In the top corner of your screen tap the kebab menu (3 dots).
3. Scroll down the list and click on **Add to Home Screen**.
4. Click **Add**. (You can rename the tool here if you want to).
5. Click **Add to Home Screen** button.

The Ontario Silica Control Tool™ should now be accessible from your device home screen.

On Respirable Crystalline Silica

1. What is silica?

Silica is the second most common mineral on earth. It consists of silicon and oxygen atoms which makes up nearly all of what we call “sand” and “rock”. Quartz is the most common form of crystalline silica and is found in varying amounts in almost all types of rocks, sands, clays, shales, and gravel. Cristobalite and tridymite are found in volcanic rocks. Crystalline silica is also a major constituent of construction materials such as bricks, tiles, and concrete.

2. What is respirable crystalline silica?

Silica becomes hazardous when it is broken into fine particles and inhaled. These fine silica dusts are known as respirable crystalline silica (RCS). Respirable crystalline silica is much smaller than ordinary sand and is small enough to penetrate into the gas-exchange region of the lungs (alveoli).

3. How can I know if my workers are even exposed to silica in the first place?

There are a variety of tasks which can take place on construction sites, where worker exposure to silica can occur. A review of common work practices, and researching into the materials being used or worked on can identify possible silica sources. References at times can also be made to the safety data sheet (SDS). Some common tasks in construction where silica exposure is evident include:

- chipping, hammering, and drilling of rock
- crushing, loading, hauling, and dumping of rock
- sawing, hammering, drilling, grinding, and chipping of concrete or masonry structures
- demolition of concrete and masonry structures
- dry sweeping or pressurized air blowing of concrete, rock, or sand dust
- road construction
- sweeping, cleaning, and dismantling equipment
- tunneling, excavation, and earth moving of soils with high silica content.

4. What are some health risks from being exposed to silica?

Occupational exposure to RCS Dust is associated with the development of silicosis, lung cancer, and pulmonary tuberculosis and chronic pulmonary disease. Exposures may also be related to the development of autoimmune disorders, chronic renal diseases, and other adverse health effects. Acute silicosis can occur just weeks or months after a high exposure, and can be fatal. The other delayed health effects can appear years later. Watch this [WorkSafeBC video here](#) for further explanation.

On Exposure Control Plans

1. What is an exposure control plan?

Exposure control plans are formal documents which outline how a worker can be protected against a specific hazardous agent. Contents of an exposure control plan can typically include:

- a. Risk assessment
- b. Duties and responsibilities
- c. Current controls in place
- d. Training and education

2. Am I legally required to have an exposure control plan, under the Ontario Regulations?

Under the Ontario Regulations, exposure control plans are not specifically required. Exposure control plans can be considered as a best practice tool.

On Exposure Limits

1. What is the Ontario exposure limit for respirable crystalline silica (RCS)?

In Ontario, there are two 8-hour exposure limits set for respirable crystalline silica. Differentiation is set based on the type of silica. For respirable crystalline silica (quartz and tripoli) the 8-hour exposure limit is 0.1 mg/m³. Whereas for respirable crystalline silica (cristobalite), the 8hr exposure limit is 0.05 mg/m³.

2. Why does the Ontario Silica Control Tool™ have an exposure limit lower than what is mentioned in Regulation 833 and O. Reg. 490/09?

The Ontario Silica Control Tool™ can only factor in one exposure limit. As a result, a protective exposure limit of 0.05 mg/m³ is set on the tool, applicable to all types of respirable crystalline silica. It should be noted that the Ontario has not adopted the current ACGIH Threshold Limit Values (TLVs), which sets the limit as 0.025 mg/m³.

3. I see the term action limit used in the Ontario Silica Control Tool™- what does this mean?

The level of concentration of a harmful or toxic substance or contaminant (such as RCS Dust) that when exceeded is considered sufficient to warrant regulatory action/provisions. In Ontario, the action level is set at 0.025 mg/m³, which is half of the exposure limit of 0.05 mg/m³.

4. I am an Employer in the Construction Industry in Ontario, and I know that O.Reg 490/09 on Designated Substances does not apply to an employer on a construction project, so why should I even care about silica?

Although O. Reg. 490/09 and the OEL for silica do not apply to an employer on a construction project or to their workers at the project, employers still have a responsibility to protect the health of their workers and to comply with the OHS and other applicable regulations. Section 25(2)(h) of the OHS requires that employers take “every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker.”

On the Ontario Silica Control Tool™

1. Does the Ontario Silica Control Tool™ replace traditional air quality exposure assessments?

No, The Ontario Silica Control Tool™ is not a replacement for professional advice or jobsite air monitoring tests as may be needed. MLITSD Inspectors acknowledge this is a best practice tool, however may ask for additional testing.

2. Can the tool consider multiple tasks at a time?

No, the tool only considers one task at a time. When reviewing the results, consider adjacent tasks which may be taking place next to the worker, which can influence silica exposure levels.

3. Does the MLITSD have access to the data I submit into the tool, and see how my workers are exposed?

No. The Ontario Silica Control Tool™ is a data-driven program, so the information you provide will also help inform action plans for other users, and help keep the tool current with activities and practices in the construction industry. Your personal and professional data will not be shared with entities outside of project partners, OHCOW, CCOHS and IHSA. Your data and general use of the Ontario Silica Control Tool™ will not be used for compliance or enforcement purposes.

4. What are some resources to learn more about silica in construction?

You can refer to the following resources:

- [Safety Talk - Silica](#)
- [Safety Talk - Silica Cutting and Grinding Concrete](#)
- [Safety Talk - Installing and Finishing Drywall](#)
- [Basics of Silica - eLearning Course](#)
- [MLITSD - Silica on Construction Projects](#)
- [OHCOW Silica Resource Page](#)
- [IHSA - Silica Control Tool Resource Page](#)