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Sand Producers Support OSHA's New Silica Rule in Principle, but Say Lower Exposure Limit is Not Necessary to Protect Workers' Health

WASHINGTON, March 24, 2016 -- The National Industrial Sand Association (NISA) says it supports most, but not all, of a new comprehensive silica standard announced today by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA). The new rule includes new mandatory exposure monitoring, medical surveillance and recordkeeping requirements that the association representing the country's major sand producing companies believes will greatly improve compliance, provide added protections for workers and lead to the elimination of silicosis from the workplace.

The Association, however, says it does not support the new rule's most controversial provision that would cut the current permissible exposure limit (PEL) for silica in half because, it says, it is not necessary to protect workers.

"The major reason silicosis is still a threat to worker health is not because the mandated exposure limit is too high, it is because of the level of compliance among industry is too low," said Mark Ellis, president of the National Industrial Sand Association. "The major impact of OSHA's new rule is not the change in the permissible exposure limit. It is that it will for the first time require employers to regularly monitor the level of silica exposure in their workplaces and the health of their employees to insure companies are doing what is necessary to protect workers. That is long overdue."

The exposure monitoring and medical surveillance provisions in OSHA's new rule are similar to the National Industrial Sand Association's more than 30-year-old occupational health program that has eliminated silicosis from its member sand company workplaces under the current exposure limit. OSHA has repeatedly praised NISA companies' good practices, as have leaders in organized labor and in the occupational health community.

In testimony before an OSHA public hearing on March 20, 2014, NISA urged the agency to adopt a comprehensive standard that would require exposure monitoring and medical surveillance at an action level of 50 micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), while maintaining the current permissible exposure limit of 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. In a work environment, an action level is the exposure level at which an employer must take specific precautions to protect workers and is normally one-half of the permissible exposure limit.

The National Industrial Sand Association (NISA) is a trade association representing the major North American producers and processors of industrial sand (sometimes called silica sand). Founded in 1936, NISA is committed to advancing research and maintaining a dialogue with industry, legislators, regulatory agencies and the scientific community with respect to issues of concern to the industrial sand industry, including the potential health effects associated with the inhalation of respirable crystalline silica. For more information go to: <http://www.sand.org>.