



Respirable Crystalline Silica dust exposure of stone workers

BELGIUM

- **DURATION:** 25/06/2020-22/03/2023
- **SECTOR:** stone workers (NACE 23.70 cutting, shaping and finishing of stone)
- **NUMBER OF INSPECTED ENTITIES:** 37
- **NUMBER OF INSPECTORS ENGAGED IN THE CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES:** 23



OVERVIEW OF THE CAMPAIGN

The purpose of the inspection was to perform a baseline measurement of compliance in this sector with regard to the protection of workers from the risks of respirable crystalline silica and to spur the industry into action. The general observation was that no workstations were found where only (or mainly) artificial stone was processed. However, the results of the inspection campaign clearly show that exposure to respirable crystalline silica remains a serious occupational health risk. Nearly all the visited workplaces showed major deficiencies in protecting workers from exposure to inhaled crystalline dust. Several employers were found to exceed the occupational exposure limit for respirable dust (not specified) or respirable crystalline silica. Of particular concern appears to be the 'final processing' workstation, where workers use manual tools and often do not use sufficient collective protection. This campaign has shown that far too few preventive measures are being taken in this sector. There is a general need to raise awareness and inform employers in order to minimise exposure to as low doses as is technically possible. Based on the results of the local campaign, it was recognized that a follow-up national campaign would be necessary in 2024. This nationwide campaign has now been completed and the results are being processed.



PLANNING OF THE CAMPAIGN

The priority area for the campaign was chosen on the basis of numerous scientific papers on silicosis outbreaks in workers working with artificial stone around the world, including in Belgium. As part of this local campaign (in the province of West Flanders), all employers in this sector who could be suspected of working with artificial stone were visited. 'Mercator PP', an in-house IT tool, was used to isolate the group of control subjects. It was used to consult the existing database maintained by the National Social Security Office and generate a list of companies with an address and a NACE code within the scope of this campaign.



ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The duration of the inspection activities carried out at an inspected entity was 2 to 4 hours. A similar amount of time was spent at the labour inspection office. The websites of the enterprises, detailing the products offered, were used to select the entities. Only enterprises that could be suspected of processing artificial stone were selected for a visit. Solely labour inspectors who had received a specific training for the campaign were involved in carrying out the inspections. The labour inspectors were provided with information on the risk of exposure to respirable crystalline silica, applicable legislation, a checklist for this campaign and for recording the results. An IT tool ('Quaestor') is also at the inspectors' disposal, it allows the inspector to see the history of the employer, as well as any addresses of the employer and contact details of persons associated with the enterprise.

CAMPAIGN ASSESSMENT

The effects of the campaign were assessed on the basis of the checklists provided, the number and type of legal measures issued by inspectors and implemented by employers after the inspections. One of the effects of the local campaign was the initiation of a follow-up national campaign in 2024 in the same sector.