

HSE says no dry cutting of engineered stone ahead of inspection crackdown

- Landmark guidance issued for first time as regulator responds to silicosis deaths of young workers
- Dry cutting declared unacceptable and water suppression confirmed as legal requirement.
- Enforcement measures ramped up with the first of over 1,000 inspections already underway

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has today announced a major package of measures to protect workers from the dangers of engineered stone dust, including silicosis, a deadly-but-preventable lung disease caused by breathing in silica dust released during stone cutting.

The package includes the publication of new [guidance](#) making clear that dry cutting of engineered stone is unacceptable and that water suppression techniques, already used by many industry leaders, are how businesses should meet the legal requirement.

The guidance, launched ahead of this week's Stone & Surfaces Show of industry leaders and tradespeople, will be backed-up by a nationwide inspection programme. Over the next 12 months, HSE inspectors will conduct more than 1,000 visits to fabricators across Great Britain, with enforcement action taken against those failing to meet the required standards. The first inspections are already underway.

The deaths of two young workers from silicosis in recent years prompted calls for action on engineered stone cutting from MPs, trade unions, and medical professionals.

In response to these emerging cases, HSE undertook a two-year process of research and industry engagement and has concluded that the most effective and proportionate action is to make sure proper controls are in place and actively enforced.

The research found that dry fabrication typically results in exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS) five to ten times higher than wet methods using equivalent tools. It also found that lower-content silica engineered stone is available at the same quality, removing any reason for businesses not to switch to less dangerous products. On the back of this evidence, HSE is acting decisively to ensure those controls become universal across the industry.

To provide clarity to businesses and workers, HSE has published its first-ever COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) [guidance sheet](#) specifically for engineered stone. The guidance sets out in plain English what employers must do: switch to engineered stone with a low silica

content; use on-tool water suppression, control mist; provide appropriate respiratory protective equipment (RPE); and carry out regular health surveillance. These are legal requirements.

Mike Calcutt, Deputy Director in HSE's Engagement and Policy Division, said:

"Today's guidance marks our most significant intervention in the engineered stone sector to date, and not without good reason.

"Silicosis is incurable, but it is entirely preventable. No worker should lose their life to a lung disease caused by their job, and that is why we have taken this action.

"We have spent the past two years conducting extensive research and industry engagement to understand the scale of this risk. What we found was stark. Many businesses are not putting the right controls in place, they are still using engineered stone with high silica content, and dry cutting, which must stop.

"To every employer in this sector: the guidance is now published, the expectations are clear, and our inspectors are coming. Those who are cutting corners are not just putting their workers at risk – they are undercutting the businesses doing things properly. We will create a level playing field.

"To workers handling engineered stone: know your rights and know the controls that should be keeping you safe. If you have concerns, contact HSE."

Engineered stone, widely used in kitchen and bathroom worktops, can contain up to 95% crystalline silica. Unlike natural stone, where silica-related disease typically takes decades to develop, recent cases have suggested that exposure to engineered stone dust can cause silicosis in a matter of months or years. Workers can suffer permanent and irreversible lung damage before experiencing any symptoms. By the time symptoms appear, it may be too late.

Sir Stephen Timms, Minister for Social Security and Disability, said:

"Every worker deserves to come home safe, without fear of losing their life to a preventable, deadly lung disease caused by their job.

"This new guidance gives businesses clear, unambiguous instructions on what the law requires, and this spring and summer HSE will carry out more than 1,000 inspections across the industry to make sure those standards are enforced, and the lives of workers protected."

Kevin Bampton, Chief Executive Officer of the British Occupational Hygiene Society, said:

"While the cause of headline-grabbing acute silicosis lies with businesses which blatantly flout the law and exploit workers, HSE's revised guidance provides much-needed clarity for the mainstream industry and for the professionals supporting it. As the UK's leading scientific organization on

health protection in the workplace, we are grateful to HSE's science team for addressing previously unanswered questions about the effectiveness of controls. The guidance reflects this evidence base and brings clarity to what is needed to help protect workers."

Nigel Fletcher, Operations Officer at the Worktop Fabricators Federation, said:

"We welcome HSE's new guidance, which clarifies what good control looks like when working with engineered stone. The WFF is committed to advancing worker safety in the fabrication industry by training and education of control measures, reducing dust exposure, and addressing other critical hazards.

"Consumers and designers can be assured that WFF membership signifies responsible practices that ensure worker well-being throughout the process, which is why we created the WFF quality mark. Only fabricators meeting rigorous standards will be granted permission to display the WFF quality mark. More than a logo, it demonstrates a company's commitment to health and safety and reflects their investment in resources and dedication to reputable practices."

The inspection campaign forms part of HSE's wider programme of work in the sector running through 2026 to 2027, which includes continued engagement with employers and trade bodies to drive compliance and raise awareness of legal duties.

Workers or employers with concerns about the level of controls in their workplace can contact HSE on 0300 003 1647 or visit [hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk). If they are concerned about their own health they should seek medical advice.

Ends

Notes to editors:

- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We are dedicated to protecting people and places, and helping everyone lead safer and healthier lives.
- HSE's new guidance for engineered stone outlines the controls that should be in place when working with the material, which effectively rules out dry-cutting, unless businesses can demonstrate an equally effective or better control is in place. This is not a new law, or a formal prohibition as would be achieved with changes to legislation
- The new COSHH guidance for engineered stone is available at [hse.gov.uk https://www.hse.gov.uk/stonemasonry/working-engineered-stone-control-silica-risk.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stonemasonry/working-engineered-stone-control-silica-risk.htm).
- Respirable crystalline silica (RCS) dust is invisible to the naked eye and can penetrate deep into the lungs, causing silicosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung cancer.
- HSE's 1,000+ inspection programme begins May/June 2026 and runs through the 2026/27 period.

- HSE is also working with manufacturers, suppliers and importers to encourage the supply of lower-silica engineered stone products, which research indicates are a viable alternative to high-silica materials. Manufacturers have a legal duty under Section 6 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to provide adequate information about the risks associated with their products and the controls required to work with them safely.
- Further details on the latest HSE news releases are available at hse.gov.uk.