

# Breathing easy

Each year, an estimated 12,000 deaths are attributed to occupational lung diseases in the UK, with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and non-asbestos-related lung cancers accounting for over half of these fatalities. Data published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2023 paints a stark picture of workplace health hazards, particularly the risks associated with inhaling respirable dust, Ira Morris, country manager at Dustcontrol UK writes

According to the HSE, silica dust alone contributes to approximately 500 deaths each year in the UK.

This issue takes on heightened urgency as November marked both COPD awareness day and Lung Cancer awareness month. While these events serve to promote early detection and prevention, they also spotlight the role of workplace exposures in the onset of these conditions. Among the gravest concerns is the sharp rise of silicosis cases – a preventable yet incurable lung disease linked to the inhalation of respirable crystalline silica (RCS).

## Dust inhalation: The pint you don't see

At Dustcontrol UK, we have long been pushing for more to be done to protect workers from the dangers of dust inhalation.

Our recent *Dust to Dust* campaign visualises the dangers of prolonged dust inhalation. Over a 40-year career, an average construction worker without proper dust extraction equipment could inhale up to 0.68 pints of respirable crystalline silica (RCS), and if you consider wider harmful dust exposure this is expected to be up to 1.28 pints. This invisible threat is more than a statistic; it is a health crisis in slow motion.

But RCS is not the only culprit. Other hazardous dust types, including wood dust and asbestos, remain prevalent in various industries. Together, these airborne threats significantly raise the risk of chronic lung diseases, lung cancer, and even nasal cancer.

## The role of effective dust management

Preventing workplace dust exposure is not only a moral imperative but a legal obligation under the UK's Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations. These require employers to implement robust measures to mitigate risks. Fortunately, effective solutions exist.

Dustcontrol UK has pioneered innovations in dust extraction technology, with systems designed to capture dust directly at its source. Featuring high-performance HEPA-13 filters, our solutions remove 99.995% of harmful particles, ensuring cleaner, safer air for workers.

We offer a robust 'Dust Doctor' programme, which sends experienced safety specialists to manufacturing sites across the UK. We engage with teams to highlight the often-overlooked dangers of dust exposure and provide practical solutions tailored to the specific needs of each workplace.

### Key strategies for dust control include:

- Investment in dust extraction systems: employing on-tool extraction equipment and air cleaners can drastically reduce airborne dust. Dustcontrol's AirCube and DC Tromb models are prime examples of this technology in action.



Ira Morris

- Regular maintenance: local exhaust ventilation (LEV) systems must undergo routine testing and filter replacements to maintain effectiveness.

- Training and awareness: workers and site managers must understand the dangers of dust and the best practices for prevention. Dustcontrol UK's Dust Doctor initiative offers onsite training and assessments to support compliance and safety.

- Adopting new regulations: as the HSE rolls out updated guidelines for engineered stone fabrication, businesses must act swiftly to adopt these measures.

## Looking ahead: A safer future

Occupational lung diseases are largely preventable with proper intervention. By combining cutting-edge dust extraction technologies with comprehensive worker education and regulatory compliance, industries can ensure that workers breathe clean air, not dust.

As cases of silicosis and other lung diseases continue to rise, now is the time for businesses to put the health and safety of their employees first through prevention. The pint of dust must remain a cautionary tale, not a reality for the next generation of workers. □

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