

ULTRA ACCESS

Silicosis - the hidden danger

Its equally as deadly as Asbestosis and far less known about...

Silicosis is an irreversible, progressive, and frequently fatal lung disease caused by the inhalation of respirable crystalline silica (RCS) dust.

In the British Construction sector, one of the most common yet under-recognised exposure scenarios is drilling or cutting scaffold anchor ties into brickwork, blockwork, or sandstone without adequate **R**espiratory **P**rotective **E**quipment (**RPE**) and dust suppression.

Bricks, concrete, blocks, and many historic masonry types contain 20–70 % crystalline silica, which is a looming threat that many scaffolders face - especially those with long careers working on residential projects.

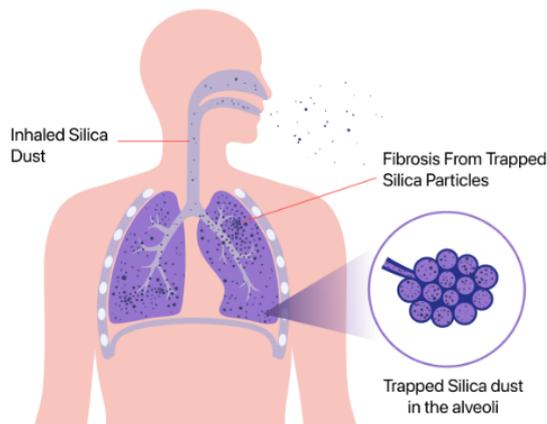
The simple task of drilling in some scaffolding ties, can over time become a death sentence...

For example:

A single 10 - 12mm scaffold tie hole drilled dry with a standard hammer drill can generate RCS concentrations exceeding hundreds of times the UK Workplace Exposure Limit (WEL) of 0.1 mg/m³

So, how does Silicosis affect the body...?

Silicosis Developing in the Lungs



Microscopic silica particles enter the lungs, similar to asbestos fibres and scar the alveoli - the air-sacks within the lungs, which help one breath.

Early symptoms include shortness of breath during physical exertion and a dry cough... these are often dismissed as "just getting older" or smoking-related.

By the time a chest X-ray shows the classic "egg-shell" calcification due to a build up of dust the lung function is already permanently reduced.

Life expectancy after diagnosis of accelerated silicosis is typically less than 10 years.

Adhering to your Risk Assessment / Method Statements (RAMS), and wearing the correct RPE - like masks, more specifically ones that are designed to be easily removable and cost effective like FFP3 ones should offer suitable protection when drilling in scaffold ties.

And NEVER blow the holes out with your mouths... always use a pump.

In short: the particles from drilling scaffold ties are not "just dust"... respect the risks involved and start treating it as the lethal carcinogen it is.