

Highwall Drill Operator



Health Hazard Information Card HH-45

U.S. Department of Labor
Mine Safety and Health Administration

Black lung and silicosis are two disabling and sometimes fatal lung diseases caused by overexposure to respirable coal mine dusts. Highwall drills present unique problems in controlling exposure to respirable dust due to the



function they perform and the number of surface miners working in and around the drill area.

Highwall drills may work in locations exposed to road dust, downwind of other dust generating equipment, or drill into strata containing high concentrations of silicosis causing quartz. Samples collected from July 1, 2006, to June 30, 2007, on highwall drills indicate:

Highwall Drills	Valid Samples Collected	Percent Greater than the Standard	Average Percent Quartz*
Operator Samples	343	11.4	10.6
MSHA Samples	580	4.3	12.6
All Samples	923	6.9	12.3

*On entities with reduced standards.

Highwall drill operators who are exposed to respirable coal mine dust containing greater than 5% quartz are likely overexposed to quartz and are at a greater risk of developing lung disease. **At any given time approximately 75% of all highwall drills classified as a Designated Work Position (DWP) are on a reduced standard due to quartz.**

MSHA has developed this guide to assist miners in using all available tools to **Control the Dust and Prevent Black Lung.**

You should always:

- ✓ Check the operation of available dust controls, such as dust collection systems when operating a highwall drill.
- ✓ Check dust control systems: drill steel skirting, system air leaks, filter condition and placement, broken or missing components, and dust coming from the collector's exhaust. Report worn or defective components immediately.
- ✓ Maintain environmental cabs clean inside. Examine and maintain window and door glass and seals; and heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems.
- ✓ Clean or replace air conditioning and air handling/pressurization filters at least as often as the manufacturers recommend.
- ✓ Check wet drilling systems for water system leakage and adequate water delivery.
- ✓ Position yourself out of the dust when possible. Highwall drill operators and helpers should be upwind and clear of dust clouds.
- ✓ Clean off boots to lower the amount of dust deposited in the cab of the highwall drill.
- ✓ Select and use properly fitted respirators when concentrations exceed the applicable respirable dust standard.

You should never:

- ❖ Operate a highwall drill with inoperable, defective, or missing dust controls.
- ❖ Use compressed air or dry sweeping to clean environmental cabs.
- ❖ Drill dry with a wet drilling system.

If you have questions about coal mine health matters, please contact your local MSHA office or see the MSHA website at www.msha.gov.