

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-1703

October 13, 2025

The Honorable Lori Chavez-DeRemer  
Secretary  
Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Chavez-DeRemer:

**I am writing to urge the Department of Labor to implement the “Silica Dust Rule” with all deliberate speed.<sup>1</sup> Any further delay will cost precious lives.**

Kentucky was at the forefront of the last energy revolution, but we paid for it with the health and safety of our miners. The same story echoes across mining communities nationwide: pneumoconiosis, or black lung disease, affects one in every ten miners. In Appalachia, it's one in five.<sup>2</sup> After years of progress, a full-blown resurgence is underway.<sup>3</sup>

Black lung doesn't care who you voted for in the last election. As an American, the rates of this incurable, but entirely preventable, disease are unacceptable. As you know, silica dust is roughly 20x more toxic than coal dust.<sup>4</sup> In the last decade or so, mining has gone deeper into remaining coal reserves, meaning workers are cutting through increasingly smaller coal seams in silica-rich rock, requiring more intensive extraction and exposing miners to deadlier conditions. Today, miners are falling ill faster and younger.

For decades, the federal government failed to protect our miners. We allowed coal executives to subject our miners to these known dangers, raking in profit off their backs. While every other Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)-covered workplace is bound to a limit of 50 micrograms of respirable crystalline silica per cubic meter of air ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) per shift, Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA)-covered mines were allowed to exceed that limit

---

<sup>1</sup> “Lowering Miners’ Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica and Improving Respiratory Protection,” 89 FR 28218 (Apr. 18, 2024) (final rule) <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/18/2024-06920/lowering-miners-exposure-to-respirable-crystalline-silica-and-improving-respiratory-protection>

<sup>2</sup> United Mine Workers of America: “Pneumoconiosis: The Coalfield Crisis that Never Ends” <https://umwa.org/news-media/journal/pneumoconiosis-the-coalfield-crisis-that-never-ends/>

<sup>3</sup> New York Times: “How Black Lung Came Roaring Back to Coal Country” <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/19/well/black-lung-appalachia-coal-miners.html#:~:text=Nationwide%2C%20one%20in%2010%20working,more%20scarring%20in%20the%20lungs.>

<sup>4</sup> Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center: “More Coal Miner Lives in Jeopardy as Silica Safeguard Delayed Yet Again” <https://aclc.org/2025/08/18/more-coal-miner-lives-in-jeopardy-as-silica-safeguard-delayed-yet-again/>

despite overwhelming evidence of harm. The Silica Dust Rule is the product of decades of work by coal community advocates, researchers, journalists, miners, and MSHA. Under the Biden Administration, MSHA engaged deeply with these stakeholders to draft the first silica regulation in 50 years, one that would finally bring mining sites in line with the same 50  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  limit that applies elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> That was progress. I urge the Trump Administration to take the same urgency to this epidemic.

In my community of Louisville, Kentucky, I was proud to welcome then-MSHA Administrator Chris Williamson to a roundtable on June 17, 2024, the effective date of the Silica Dust Rule.<sup>6</sup> We heard directly from miners, their families, NIOSH researchers, and local advocates. For the first time in a long time, there was real hope. But since then, this Administration has eroded that trust. In April 2025, over four-fifths of NIOSH staff were laid off, and 34 MSHA offices were slated for closure.<sup>7</sup> Litigation and public outcry have reversed most of those cuts, but the message sent to mining communities was clear: their health and safety were being traded for corporate convenience.

The Department has continued to delay the Silica Dust Rule further and further from its compliance dates citing “NIOSH restructuring” and litigation. Our miners and their families can’t afford any further delays. I urge you to use all tools at the Department’s disposal to continue and expedite full implementation. Everyone deserves a safe place to work and to come home healthy at the end of the day. As Secretary of Labor, you’re tasked with this sacred obligation. The health of our miners and our coal communities have been sacrificed to fuel America's economic strength. We owe them more than gratitude. We owe them action.

Sincerely,



Morgan McGarvey  
Member of Congress

---

<sup>5</sup> FR Doc. 2024-06920 Filed 4-16-24, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/18/2024-06920/lowering-miners-exposure-to-respirable-crystalline-silica-and-improving-respiratory-protection>

<sup>6</sup> Public Health Watch: “Federal Crackdown on Silica Dust Begins as Mining Industry Sues to Block It” <https://publichealthwatch.org/2024/06/18/federal-crackdown-on-silica-dust-begins-as-mining-industry-sues-to-block-it/>

<sup>7</sup> NPR: “Under pressure, HHS reinstates hundreds of occupational health workers” <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/14/nx-s1-5398092/niosh-reinstates-occupational-health-workers>

AP News: “Trump administration reverses planned closures of 3 dozen US mine safety offices” <https://apnews.com/article/mine-safety-office-closure-msha-doge-trump-43fd355260d7c2373f48a25e35455f5b>