

Block splitting

Construction Occupational Health case study COH09

The problem

Cutting blocks to size is usually done on site. Some blocks will always have to be cut to fit the end of a wall, floor, or when building around other components (eg steel frames and pillars). A stone saw is typically used to size blocks.

The risks

Stone saws generate large amounts of dust that is likely to contain respirable crystalline silica (RCS). Workers who inhale RCS can develop permanent lung damage, which is called silicosis.

Stone saws also generate high levels of noise and vibration.

The solution

Eliminate risks by using a method that doesn't produce dust – building blocks and block paving can be reduced in size using a manual or a hydraulic block splitter.



Figure 1 Block splitter

The benefits

- A block splitter reduces the need to use a noisy stone saw that generates dust.
- A clean process reduces the likelihood of complaints from other trades, and bad publicity.

Notes

- Block splitters are relatively cheap to buy or hire.
- Blades need routine checking and replacement to make sure that the block splitter continues to work efficiently.
- Difficult cuts can still be done with a stone saw but dust suppression and a suitable mask will be needed to effectively control the operator's exposure.
- Suitable eye protection should be worn.