

## The Dangers of Dust

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Masks are the hot topic of conversation at the moment. Ceramic makers everywhere sent up a unanimous cry of horror across social media at the sight of Matt tying a tea towel around his head in preparation for dry-sanding a piece on the first episode of the Great Pottery Throw Down. It left many potters disappointed that the opportunity to educate on this critical aspect of ceramic health and safety had been missed.

Many in Stoke-on-Trent are only too aware of the dangers of silica dust. Stoke was once the 'world capital of silicosis' amongst its pottery workers. Vastly improved health and safety practices, monitoring and equipment these days means that this horrible condition has thankfully all but disappeared. Our close relationship with HSE in respect of our own factory means that we are well-versed in 'best practices' which also translate to the ceramic workshop or studio.

Especially for those new to Ceramics, the correct health and safety advice is vital. A tea towel tied around your head just doesn't cut it. When you're dealing with ceramic dust, a face mask with P3 filters which catch the finest particles of silica is the only safe option. The JSP Force 8 'Press to Check' mask has a useful feature that allows you to check for good face fit before use. However for those with beards and moustaches, a full-face respirator might be needed as facial hair can interfere with the fit of the mask.

But masks are only part of the story. Practicing good studio 'housekeeping' is essential to keep dust levels down and reduce exposure limits by eliminating as much dust as possible at source.

**Rule #1: Be a tidy worker!** Avoid generating airborne dust in the first place. Store dry materials in covered containers. Do 'dusty' work such as glaze mixing and spraying under extraction if you can. A wet-back spray booth is ideal. Clean up spillages with a damp sponge immediately before they have chance to dry out and create dust. Give your equipment, tools, work areas and floors a thorough damp wipe-down after each making session. Those with larger studios may consider investing in a specialist vacuum cleaner with HEPA filters, which is designed to be capable of filtering silica dust. Maintain your vacuum regularly by washing or replacing filters.

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**Rule #2: Always use wet/damp processes wherever possible.** If you're fettling, try to do this at the damp stage and clear away debris as soon as possible. If you're sanding/polishing bisque, do this under running water. When cleaning surfaces and floors, use a damp sponge or a wet mop and not a sweeping brush (if you absolutely have to dry-sweep, always wear a P3 mask).

**Rule #3: Wear synthetic fibres.** Silica dust doesn't cling so readily to synthetic fibres which is why it's always best to opt for these when choosing an apron or overalls, and dress accordingly for the studio. Big woolly jumpers, whilst they might be tempting for your freezing cold studio in the depths of winter, are not the best choice of attire!

Following the above advice will vastly reduce the hazards associated with dust. And remember - you only have one pair of lungs, so look after them!

#### **Disclaimer: Technical advice**

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