

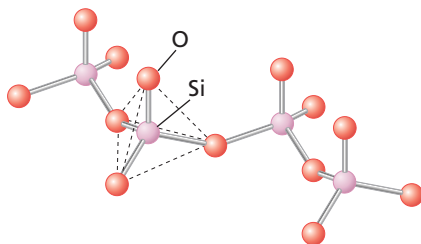
APPLICATION *Chemical Industry***Silicon and Silicates**

Silicon is as important in the mineral world as carbon is in living systems. Silicon dioxide and silicates make up about 87% of Earth's crust. Silicates are a class of compounds containing silicon, oxygen, one or more metals, and possibly hydrogen. Many mineral compounds are silicates. Sand is probably the most familiar silicate.

Glasses consist of 75% silicate. Borosilicate glass is the special heat-resistant glass used in making laboratory beakers and flasks. The addition of 5% boron oxide to the glass increases the softening temperature of the glass. Because boron and silicon atoms have roughly similar radii, these atoms can be substituted for one another to make borosilicate glass.

Asbestos is the name given to a class of fibrous magnesium silicate minerals. Asbestos is very strong and flexible, and it does not burn, so it was widely used as a heat-insulating material.

Silicon has the ability to form long chain compounds by bonding with oxygen. The SiO_4 subunit in this silicate is tetrahedral.



Silicates exist in a variety of mineral forms, including mica.

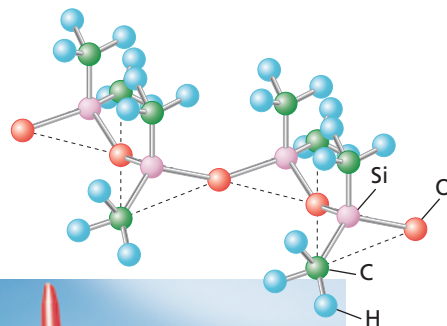
It is now known that asbestos is a carcinogen. When handled, asbestos releases dust particles that are easily inhaled and can cause lung cancer. Asbestos materials found in older homes and buildings should be removed by firms licensed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Silicones

Silicones are a class of organic silicon polymers composed of silicon, carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen. The silicon chain is held together by bonding with the oxygen atoms. Each silicon atom is also bonded to different hydrocarbon groups to create a variety of silicone structures.

Silicones are widely used for their adhesive and protective properties. They have good electric insulating properties and are water-repellent. Some silicones have the character of oils or greases, so they are used as lubricants. Silicones are also used in automobile and furniture polishes as protective agents.

Silicones also have a tetrahedral structure. How does this structure differ from that of a silicate?



Because of their protective properties, silicones are used in a number of consumer products, from cosmetics to caulking.