

# Joint statement August 2022

**Our aim is to eliminate, as far as possible, diseases caused by exposure to respirable crystalline silica and to minimise all exposures to respirable crystalline silica (RCS) in Australia.**

Over the last two decades there has been a high uptake in the use of high silica content engineered stone products, especially for kitchen and bathroom bench tops. This, combined with increased exposures in other industries, has resulted in a dramatic increase in the numbers of people diagnosed with lung and other pathologies (such as silicosis and lung cancer) due to exposure to RCS.

As there is no cure for silicosis, a significant subset of people will be plagued by deteriorating health and an untimely death.

Silica is naturally occurring and therefore present in many construction and building materials. The relevant industries include mining, tunnelling, construction, demolition, quarrying, manufacturing silica powder etc.

The increase in cases of silicosis demonstrates the lack of awareness and failure to effectively control harmful exposures to RCS.

It is essential that governments, employers and civil society implement policies and programs to systematically control exposures, including a ban on the use of high content silica engineered stone products.

To achieve the above there must be urgent implementation of all recommendations from the National Dust Diseases Taskforce, including:

- preparation for a ban on the use of high silica content engineered stone
- all workers must be protected through the enforcement and compliance by health and safety regulators on the prohibition of dry cutting of high silica content materials
- prior to the ban (see above) adoption of a licensing system for businesses using engineered stone
- a regulatory approach that removes all doubt and provides duty holders with clarity about the risk control measures necessary for “high risk” silica processes
- appropriately resourced work health and safety regulators to ensure effective and efficient compliance and enforcement of health and safety obligations, across the supply chain.

The regulatory framework must be supported by:

- targeted education and awareness campaigns across the supply chain, including consumers
- improvement in the methods to measure and control silica exposure
- reform of workers’ compensation systems to ensure affected workers are provided with medical, social and vocational support, and
- allocation of funds in a coordinated approach for research into the entire spectrum of silica-related disease, from control of exposure to support of affected workers.

The proposed national register for silicosis must be extended to all occupational dust diseases.

The benefits of the proposed actions include better support for those with silica related diseases, and a reduction in the number and severity of people suffering ill health in the medium to long term. In the process, businesses will also be supported in the provision of healthier and safer work.

It must be emphasised that silicosis and other illnesses associated with exposure to RCS are all preventable.

Endorsed by:



Liam O'Brien  
Assistant Secretary  
Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)



Tim Driscoll  
Chair, Occupational and Environmental Committee  
Cancer Council Australia



Kate Cole  
President  
Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists



Mark Brooke  
Chief Executive Officer  
Lung Foundation Australia



Naomi Kemp  
Chair  
Australian Institute of Health & Safety (AIHS)



Terry Slevin  
Chief Executive Officer  
Public Health Association Australia



Dominic Yong  
President  
The Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine Inc (ANZSOM)



John Upham  
President  
The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand

