

Joint statement

21 February 2023

Leading health bodies back calls to ban the use of engineered stone

Over the past two decades there has been a high uptake in the use of high-silica content engineered stone products and 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 respirable crystalline silica (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 and manufacturing of silica powder.

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

As experts in health, disease prevention, and occupational health and safety, we believe that it is essential that governments and employers adopt policies and programs to systematically control exposure to RCS, including implementing a ban on the use of high-content silica engineered stone products.

In addition, we urge Work Health and Safety Ministers to introduce the following:

- Partner with, and support unions, employers, and professional organisations to develop and implement a national awareness and behaviour change campaign.
- Adopt a broad silica regulation, supported by industry codes of practices, to be included in the Model Laws by the end of 2023. The scope must cover the whole supply chain and all industries (including mining and quarrying) The scope must cover the whole supply chain and all industries (including mining and quarrying in states where workers are not currently protected by these interventions) and be based on the Victorian approach. It should also include the requirement to undertake training in high-risk silica processing.
- Consult on the introduction of a ban on the use of engineered stone to be implemented by July 2024.
- Increase enforcement activity in engineered stone and other high-risk silica processing sectors.
- Require Safe Work Australia to recognise and consider the inadequacies of current workers' compensation systems for workers with chronic illnesses, such as silicosis, and propose further reforms for consideration. Governments must also investigate how to better support affected workers who are no longer in the workforce.

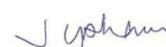
Our aim is to eliminate, as far as possible, exposure to and diseases caused by exposure to RCS in Australia.



Mark Brooke
Chief Executive Officer
Lung Foundation Australia



Terry Slevin
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association Australia



John Upham
President
The Thoracic Society of Australia
and New Zealand



Tracey Bence
President
Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists



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



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

