

Friday 4th February 2022

World Cancer Day: Thousands of Australian workers die from occupational cancer every year

Over one in ten (14%) cases of lung cancer could be prevented if asbestos, silica, diesel exhaust and welding fume exposure were reduced in workplaces, according to best available data.

This is roughly 1800 work-related deaths every year from lung cancer that could've been avoided with better safety measures.

In recent years, Australia has seen a dramatic spike in the number of workers suffering from silicosis caused by exposure to respirable silica dust. Silica dust also causes lung cancer. Without immediate action from the Federal Government and employers, the numbers of lung cancers is likely to increase.

The ACTU is calling upon the Morrison Government to take urgent action, including implementing recommendations made by the National Dust Diseases Taskforce.

Adequate workplace exposure standards, including for diesel exhaust and welding fumes, must be implemented for all dangerous substances, to avoid more preventable deaths from lung disease.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien

“World Cancer Day is a time to reflect and remember those who've lost their lives to occupational cancer. This fight won't be over until all Australian workers can go to work and know they're going to be safe from disease.

“We are calling upon the Morrison Government – once again – to implement the recommendations put forward by the National Dust Diseases Taskforce.

“There is a plague of silicosis and cancers in workers who've come into contact with silica in their workplace. This risks becoming the asbestos of our generation, and we must act to prevent huge numbers of workers becoming sick and dying now.

“Until we have an adequate, fit-for-purpose workplace exposure standard for these dangerous substances, we're going to continue to see deaths from lung disease caused by work exposure.”

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