

Tuesday 24 October 2023

The trade union movement says ban engineered stone or we will

The ACTU executive has today resolved to take all necessary steps to ban engineered stone by the middle of next year following a CFMEU motion (attached) if government bans are not in place by then.

This will mean union members will not allow engineered stone to be transported or used on building sites across Australia.

Inhaling crystalline silica dust while cutting, grinding or drilling engineered stone used of kitchen or bathroom benches can lead to silicosis, a debilitating, incurable and sometimes fatal occupational disease caused by exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS).

More than 600,000 workers in Australia are exposed to RCS at work. This includes workers in mining, quarrying, building & construction, tunnelling and manufacturing. Research estimates that if these exposures are not significantly reduced it is likely that over the course of this century we will see as many as 100,000 workers diagnosed with silicosis and a further 11,000 diagnosed with cancer.

In some states reports have shown that as many as 1 in 4 stonemasons that work with engineered stone have been diagnosed with silicosis.

Scientific and medical evidence has found that even when workers cut and fabricate low silica stone products it generates significant amounts of very fine particles of silica that are able to penetrate deep into the lungs of workers and cause disease.

In addition to taking action on banning engineered stone the ACTU executive also calls for the introduction of a national health monitoring and silicosis screening for workers exposed to respirable crystalline silica; and adequate compensation and support for affected workers.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

“The foreign multi-national corporations that manufacture and import this product have known about the risk it poses for decades and have failed to take the necessary steps or warn and protect workers. Indeed, even today we continue to see dust filled factories exposing workers to the risk of silicosis.

“Safe working conditions enjoyed by workers today were not given to us by governments or employers they were fought for and won by workers and their unions. Today the ACTU executive sends a clear message that governments should ban this harmful fashion product.”

“We welcome the decision earlier this year of WHS Ministers to introduce stronger silica rules covering all work but we must do more to ban deadly fashion product. We must also ensure that those that suffer from this disease are supported with improved medical treatment and compensation”.

ENDS

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