

Joint statement

October 27, 2023

Leading health experts back calls to ban the use of all engineered stone products.

In February 2023, following the urging of unions, public health organisations and work health and safety specialists, Work Health and Safety Ministers requested Safe Work Australia consult on the introduction of a ban on engineered stone to be implemented by July 2024 and adopt a broad silica regulation, supported by industry codes of practices, to be included in the Model Laws by the end of 2023.

As experts in health, disease prevention, and occupational health and safety we are encouraged to see that the report from Safe Work Australia to WHS Ministers supports a complete ban on the use of engineered stone products, irrespective of the level of silica.

This recommendation to ban all engineered stone, including 'low silica' products, is consistent with our calls, the findings of the National Dust Disease Taskforce Report to the previous Federal government in June 2021, and the Draft National Silicosis Prevention Strategy. Current scientific evidence is that a percentage of crystalline silica in engineered stone that is 'safe' cannot be determined.

Banning engineered stone will not eliminate silicosis but it will protect those involved in very high-risk work.

Although silicosis is a completely preventable disease, we have seen that as many as 1 in 4 stonemasons working with engineered stone are contracting a form of silicosis that develops after relatively short exposure periods, is severe and worsens relatively quickly.

Thus far industry as a whole has not been able to demonstrate that workers' health can be protected.

Our aim is to prevent silicosis in Australia. We urge WHS Ministers to immediately adopt the report's recommendation to ban all engineered stone and protect workers who are paying the true cost of our shiny kitchen benchtops.

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