

Wednesday 13 December 2023

## Engineered stone ban will save lives

The ACTU welcomes the final decision to implement a full ban on engineered stone by the Work Health and Safety Ministers earlier today. In late October Safe Work Australia released its report recommending a complete prohibition on the use of all engineered stone in Australia.

The report followed broad consultation with business groups, engineered stone manufacturers and fabricators, unions and health experts. It also included detailed economic evaluation and an analysis of evidence from the best available science when developing its recommendation.

In early October the ACTU executive resolved to take all necessary steps to ban engineered stone by the middle of next year following a CFMEU motion and their *Stop This Killer Stone* campaign *if government bans are not in place by then*.

Unions, public health experts and health and safety specialists have been warning governments about the risks associated with engineered stone for years. Inhaling crystalline silica dust while cutting, grinding or drilling engineered stone used in kitchen or bathroom benches can lead to silicosis, a debilitating, incurable and sometimes fatal occupational disease caused by exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS).

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.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

“This total ban will save lives and we thank Ministers for putting workers lives ahead of corporate profit.

“Engineered stone is a fashion product that is killing the workers who make it. With alternatives readily available, why are we risking the lives of tradies for a fashionable finish in our kitchens?

“There is no such thing as ‘safe’ engineered stone, and no safety measures that can be put in place that would eliminate the risk of this incurable and aggressive lung disease. A total ban is the only sensible option and every day that passes is costing lives”.

“The ban on engineered stone is a direct result of workers and their unions, like the CFMEU, and public health organisations who have demanded that we take the strongest possible action to keep workers safe.”

“The war on silicosis is not over and we cannot be complacent. More than 600,000 workers are exposed to silica at work, and we need strong rules in all workplaces to prevent more workers being diagnosed with this debilitating and incurable disease”

**ENDS**

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