

SILICOSIS RISK

629. Hon JAMES HAYWARD to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Industrial Relations:

I refer to the recent findings out of Curtin University of a predicted rise in cases of silicosis and lung cancer among labourers in the construction, mining, quarrying and manufacturing industries as a result of occupational exposure to silica dust.

- (1) Is the minister concerned that some workers are currently being exposed to levels of respirable crystalline silica that could cause silicosis and lung disease?
- (2) What steps is the government taking to ensure that industries responsible for the manufacture and processing of engineered stone are more stringently regulated?
- (3) Will the government act on the researchers' recommendations to implement a total ban of engineered stone; and, if not, why not?

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question. I thank him for raising the important issue of silicosis, which I actually discussed during private members' business in the last term of government. I provide the following answer based on information that has been provided to me by the Minister for Industrial Relations.

- (1) The government takes very seriously the risk posed by respirable silica particularly, though not exclusively, in the engineered stone industry. WorkSafe has conducted significant compliance work with high-risk workplaces to ensure controls are in place to reduce the health risks from exposure to respiratory crystalline silica, and this work is continuing.
- (2) The government has introduced the Work Health and Safety Act 2020 and regulations modernising all legislation relating to work health and safety. The government has introduced new legislation in the form of regulations, lowering the workplace exposure standard for respirable crystalline silica to 0.05 milligrams per cubic metre from 0.1 milligrams per cubic metre, and banning the uncontrolled dry cutting of engineered stone. The regulations also include the requirement for PCBU's to provide health monitoring for exposed workers, using low-dose, high-resolution computed tomography scans, which is an Australian first. A Western Australian code of practice, *Managing the risks of respirable crystalline silica from engineered stone in the workplace*, has recently been published. WorkSafe is continuing to conduct compliance inspections at high-risk workplaces. In the period July 2018 to May 2021, WorkSafe completed 150 workplace inspections and issued over 1 000 notices—improvement and prohibition.
- (3) As outlined in the *All of government's response to the final report of the National Dust Disease Taskforce*, the government will monitor the standards of compliance in relation to respirable crystalline silica in industry. A ban will be considered if there are no measurable improvements in compliance and/or preventive measures prove to be ineffective. Any decision to ban engineered stone products will be dependent on an objective assessment of the requirements and would, under the harmonised approach to work health and safety legislation, require commonwealth, state and territory governments to work together.