1. The Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations made an announcement in Parliament on 18 September 2018 to alert the community to safety concerns around exposure to respirable crystalline silica in stone benchtop fabrication. The Minister announced the immediate issuing of a safety alert and guide for industry, which included a prohibition on dry cutting, as well as plans to develop a code and explicit regulations on this matter.
2. Through proactive compliance audits of stone benchtop fabricators in South East Queensland, the Office of Industrial Relations has uncovered high rates of worker exposure to respirable crystalline silica occurring through poor work practices and inadequate silica dust control, in contravention of existing work health and safety laws. As the result of health screenings undertaken as part of the audits, workers’ compensation claims for silica-related diseases have increased significantly in a short period.
3. In line with the Minister’s announcement, the Office of Industrial Relations is undertaking comprehensive compliance, enforcement and awareness activities to ensure duty holders in the stone benchtop industry comply with their health and safety duties. These include:
* immediate issuing of the industry safety alert and guide;
* a roundtable to be held with respiratory physicians, radiologists and occupational physicians to discuss issues such as identification, diagnosis and the nature and frequency of health monitoring;
* the continuation of compliance audits to ensure all Queensland stone benchtop fabrication businesses are audited by the end of 2018, with WorkCover Queensland funding health screening for workers in the stone benchtop industry; and
* the development of regulations to reinforce existing requirements in the guide, including the prohibition of dry cutting of stone, as well develop a code of practice by early 2019.
1. Cabinet noted the actions being taken by the Queensland Government to manage the health risks to workers from exposure to respirable crystalline silica in the stone benchtop manufacturing industry.
2. *Attachments*
* [Industry guide – Protecting workers from exposure to respirable crystalline silica](Attachments/Guide.PDF)
* [Workers’ compensation fact sheet – Silica exposure health risk for engineered stone benchtop workers](Attachments/FactSheet.PDF)