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Safe Work Australia Submission – 27 March 2023

I am writing to share some positive insights regarding the crystalline silica issues in the stone benchtop fabrication industry. I have been a part of this industry since 1999, and I became aware of Caesarstone a year later. Engineered stone gained popularity in the benchtop industry quickly due to its desirable color palette and pricing as a solid surface.

In the early period, there was limited knowledge about the composition of this material. I am grateful to regulators and government bodies for better understanding this material for the industry. I made a conscious decision to ensure that PPE was adhered to for myself and future employees. I decided to never cut material dry in the factory and focus on collecting the best data on site to heavily limit on-site cutting. Any cutting on-site that could not be performed wet had to be done with the use of a vacuum HEPA filter system, which was always limited. If major work was to be performed on site, it would have to be returned to the factory to be reworked in a safe environment

In recent years, my business and the industry have evolved, and it is essential to invest in safe practices for the industry. If you do not understand what investment is required, you could be deemed as either ignorant or negligent. As a private company business owner, there are many pressing pressures of clients, cashflow, and taxes. Unfortunately, these pressures neglect the importance of working in a healthy environment, and it is hugely disappointing that personal health becomes a distant and unfocused issue. This needs to be addressed for many business owners in a similar position.

My business has invested many hours and has created a safe work position within the business to focus on the health and safety of us, our employees, and our clients. Some standard practices we follow include:

- Clients can only view the factory from a safe distance and can transparently see our factory through a window in our reception area. We are proud of our safe work environment.
 - Employees meet daily to discuss work and make our environment a safe, enjoyable experience.
 - Employees are privileged to a full working outfit, including rubber boots, steel-capped safety boots, overalls, work pants, work aprons, and work safety PPE, including a full ventilated face mask system. There is no option that our employees are deprived of, and they have the knowledge and safety at their discretion.
 - It is equally important to note that one's health is one's responsibility. You can lead the horse to water, but you cannot make it drink. It is the choice of one's decisions that makes that person responsible for their health.
 - Employees are health tested as per doctor requirements and have respiratory tests as per advice obtained through Safe Work South Australia.
 - The factory is air monitored periodically to assess the air quality level.
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We are aware of the importance of a safe environment in our business, and my goal is to help other business owners become better equipped to train their staff to understand the importance of our health. This issue is serious, and my business and the employees within it are the first generation of individuals navigating through this issue. We are focused on making this industry a thriving one for generations to come, with personal health and safety as our priority.

You can work safely with this material, and it can also be made better. The future composition of the material with less than 40% silica presents a wonderful opportunity to continue as a product and remain focused on creating a healthy industry.

I would be open to any questions in this regard or any further commentary from a manufactures point of view.

Kind regards,

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