

## **Prof Deborah H Yates**

**Consultant Thoracic Physician | Conjoint Professor, University of NSW**

MA MB BChir MSc AFOM (UK) Dip Occ Med MD (Cantab) F Thor Soc FRCP FRACP



### **Submission to SafeWork Australia regarding engineered stone**

I write to urge SafeWork Australia to ban engineered stone.

I am a thoracic physician of more than 30 years clinical, research and leadership experience. I am making this submission as an individual due to my concern about my patients. I have been closely involved in the ongoing work conducted by my professional organisations (the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Australian Lung Foundation) on this issue.

It has been almost ten years now since we reported the first case of artificial (engineered) stone silicosis in Australia. Since then, the number of cases of workers with engineered stone silicosis has grown exponentially. Silicosis is a disease which is totally preventable, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) called for a global silicosis elimination strategy in 2006.

Engineered stone silicosis progresses more rapidly and is associated with a higher rate of development of other medical problems than classical silicosis. It contains materials in addition to high levels of crystalline free silica and these have not been fully characterized. The full effects on human health have yet to be discovered, but definitely include an increased rate of autoimmune disease, obstructive lung disease and lung cancer.

In my clinical and research practice I see many workers whose lives have been disrupted and who are severely ill, while at the peak of their working lives. This is through no fault of their own. I saw many cases of severe silicosis in my early career, but never expected to see cases of such severity in such young men again.

It is deeply concerning to me that this should occur in Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when prevention strategies can stop silicosis altogether. Despite strategies to control silica dust in workplaces, compliance with regulatory strategies for dust control is imperfect in practice.

It is evident that engineered stone is not safe. The only solution to prevent further cases is to implement an importation ban and cease usage of this product altogether. Australia would then lead the world in this regard and serve as an example to the global community. This would also save many lives and much suffering.

Thank you for taking this personal submission into consideration.



Deborah H Yates