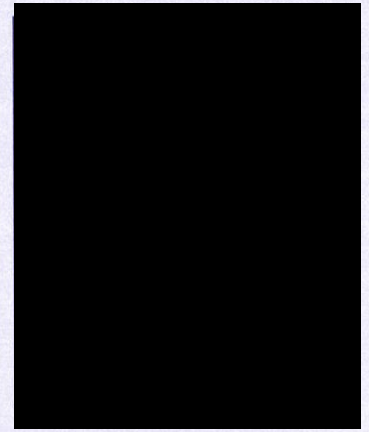




Asbestos Council of Victoria



Asbestos Council of Victoria/GARDS Inc. (ACV/GARDS)

Asbestos Council of Victoria/GARDS Inc. is a non-profit, non-government, endorsed as charity, with charity tick of approval. It has been operating in Victoria since 1991 and became incorporated in 2002. ACV/GARDS one full time employee and one part time with a band of dedicated volunteers that supports those affected by asbestos related diseases and silica disease throughout Victoria,

ACV/GARDS has approximately three hundred financial members. We have hundreds who come through our door in the year, and we answer thousands of calls for information and support. We are a 24/7 support and information service.

The organisation provides 2 x monthly support group meetings one in Gippsland and one in Metro Melbourne - Chadstone for those exposed to silica and asbestos or suffering from the effects of silica & asbestos related diseases, this is where people can share their experiences and listen to talks from guest speakers. Staff/Volunteers also provide home and hospital visits. The ACV/GARDS office is open five days a week where members and the general public can visit to get information and support. Weekends by appointment.

ACV/GARDS also loans out medical equipment to its members free of charge to assist with the expenses that come with caring for someone with an asbestos & silica related disease, including oxygen concentrators, oxygen conserving devices, wheelchairs, shower chairs and more. We only supply the medical equipment in the Gippsland area and not Victoria wide as we do not have the capacity to provide this service to the whole of Victoria at this present time due to lack of staff and finances.

ACV/GARDS plays an influential role in advocating for and educating about asbestos & silica awareness. ACV/GARDS conducts Two Asbestos Awareness Week events in November every year one in Gippsland and one in Metro Melbourne. We conduct awareness sessions with tutorials for Monash University medical students and conduct asbestos & silica awareness tutorials to TAFES in Gippsland, and in the past to Bendigo, Geelong, Berwick, and Frankston. ACV/GARDS workers also do speaking engagements for events, exhibitions, clubs, businesses, and service organisations.

With the help of medical professionals, unions & law firms ACV/GARDS ran a successful campaign to have a \$21 million cancer care centre installed at the Latrobe Regional Hospital, which was opened in 2006. ACV/GARDS also created the Asbestos in the Home Removal Kit with the help of the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council, Latrobe City Council, the Environment Protection Authority of Victoria and WorkSafe Victoria, and negotiated an apology from Premier John Brumby in 2008 to the power workers of the Latrobe Valley and their families to acknowledge their exposure and suffering. We are a member of the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Task Force, which has just wound up in March 2023 and we are a member of the Hazelwood Health Study

ACV/GARDS was a collaborative partner with Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre & Melbourne University on the establishment of a Latrobe Valley Power Industry Cohort and Biospecimen Bank for the Study of Asbestos Related Disease, for which eight hundred power workers have given their blood for the last three years to help advance research. We also have on going relationships with Peter Mac, Cancer Council Victoria, WorkSafe Victoria and the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, our CEO Vicki is an observer of the ASEA council as a representative for the National Asbestos Support Group network and is on a number of subcommittees with ASEA. ACV/GARDS has a [REDACTED]

and [REDACTED]. We also produce a newsletter twice a year.

ACV/GARDS has a [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Recommendations:

1. 2, &3.

ACV/GARDS supports the prohibition of the use of all engineered stone products, irrespective of the percentage of silica content, with an exemption to be provided for the handling, transport and any other activity associated with safely managing or removing engineered stone which is already in situ. This would be in line with the similar prohibition on the use of all forms of asbestos containing materials. This would mean that those who were handling manufactured stone would need to be trained in the dangers posed by engineered stone – they would need training in the safe handling and disposal of the said stone.

Question 7.

We do not believe that the industry is capable of policing itself as a support group for silica workers we have heard that some employers have changed the job title of some workers to avoid scrutiny.

We do not believe the government has the resources to police re-enforcing a code of conduct or licencing scheme to prevent people being exposed. Apprentices regularly report that engineered stone is still being cut on site and the premises are being left with dust in them. Also other trades doing work are being exposed while they are on site too.

We believe it will be almost impossible for any authority to be able to police all the places that engineered stone may be cut.

Question 10

No there should not be any transitional period for the prohibition on engineered stone as this problem and its dangers have been known for more than decade and we have known what has been going on in this industry for all that time. None of this is any surprise.

Question 12

The direct impacts of silicosis are very extreme and display themselves in many forms – these workers are young in their 30s and 40s and have young families – besides being informed that they have limited life expectancy as this is a progressive illness – coughing, weight loss, fatigue, joint pain, and many other diseases develop from this chronic problem. There are no real solutions to this disease other than if you are deemed fit enough to have a lung lavage – which involves a general anaesthetic and flushing several litres of a salt-water solution through each lung with the

aim of “washing out” damaging silica crystals. or a lung transplant both of which are very extreme and have risks in themselves and limited to the very fortunate. There are not enough mental health workers in Victoria to take care of those coming through with silica poisoning and there needs to be more financial emphasis on these services as well as more research into drugs to try and help those suffering joint pain and arthritic pain from this disease as some of our sufferers are in extreme pain all the time.

If you wish to find out all the side effects of silicosis in all its forms and what silicosis can cause we suggest you contact Dr Ryan Hoy a Respiratory physician who sees many of our workers in Victoria.

For further information contact Asbestos Council of Victoria/GARDS Inc. CEO/Secretary Vicki Hamilton OAM

Dated 2nd April 2023