

Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Comr

From: L E [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 4 January 2019 7:50 AM
To: Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee
Subject: Dust Register Bill Amendments - Yes Submission
Attachments: Silicosis letter.pdf

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

2nd submit, includes contact details.

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am in favor of the Bill Amendments to include Silicosis on the Dust Register. I have a family member affected with silicosis from the artificial stone industry. He is 31 years of age and has been told he does not know how long he will have to live. He has a toddler and they were planning for another child. Our family are beyond distraught! I believe there are many more victims but who knows how many and unless the Government acknowledges the tragedy I suspect there will not be much done to try to help them.

I have attached a letter which I wrote for your information, and below is a link to a fabulous published article written by one of the Doctors which can explain some facts from her point of view:
<https://croakey.org/time-for-a-national-response-to-the-epidemic-of-silicosis-from-manufactured-stone-benchtopy-use-in-australia/>

Regards Lynda Eastburn

[REDACTED]

15/11/18

From young healthy stone workers to lung disease victims – How? Why?

My name is Lynda Eastburn, my family and I have been directly affected with a family member and his closest friends having been diagnosed with silicosis in September this year. We didn't know what silicosis was but after a specialist visit and some research we are starting to understand, and the more we find, the more frightened and angry we are. The young men were immediately dismissed from their jobs and are now receiving 85% of their former pay, less any car or phone entitlements they had. The silicosis we are told will kill them, we don't know if this will be in 3 or 20 years, nor how long they will have any quality of life, or how long they will be struggling to breath on oxygen tanks. Many of the men being diagnosed are in their early 30's, the prime of their life, some with partners and young families, including my son in law. This tragedy will deeply affect not only the victims but their families forever as well.

The men were working in the stone benchtop industry cutting benchtops for small businesses on the Gold Coast. They were using paper masks which clog up very quickly so were impractical and often not used at all. Respiratory physician Dr Ryan Hoy advised us at a conference last week that the paper masks are totally useless anyway as the dangerous dust is very fine and goes straight through them.

Upon doing some research it is evident that silicosis is a progressive, incurable lung disease which has been known about for years, there are reports that even in the 1900's it was acknowledged that stone workers were falling ill and dying prematurely. In the US in 1930 there was an epidemic of silicosis from construction workers on the Hawk's Nest Tunnel resulting in at least 400 deaths.

An article released in 2012 (www.researchgate.net/publication/221882272), warned how 25 patients with silicosis underwent lung transplants in Israel after working with the relatively new, and much more dangerous, artificial stone product with high crystalline silica content, which is what we were using in Australia. They warned "This silicosis outbreak is important because of the worldwide use of this and similar high-silica-content, artificial stone products. Further cases are likely to occur unless effective preventative measures are undertaken, and existing safety practices are enforced."

So even if the Australian authorities have had their heads in the sand regarding these and thousands more articles from around the world, the dangers have been becoming evident in Australia; Dr Ryan Hoy said in an article in 2017 (wiedersehn, Sarah. NZ Newswire; Wellington [Wellington] 23 Nov 2017), he is aware of 7 new cases of silicosis diagnosed in the last 5 years, caused by work with artificial stone in Australia, 6 of which had advanced to progressive massive fibrosis. Dr Hoy also commented (Sydney Morning Herald 2 Dec 2017) "cases likely represented the tip of the iceberg, but because there was no national register for lung disease it was impossible to know how many more could be out there." Many more have been diagnosed since this article.

In March 2018 icare has reported 43 cases of silicosis since 2012. They stated 95% of people were not aware of the dangers of working with silica (Buckley, Danielle, Fairfield Advance, Liverpool, NSW [Liverpool, NSW] 14 Mar 2018). Stone cutters continued working totally oblivious to the dangers even well after this announcement in March 2018. Wet cutting and ventilators had been introduced during this time, well after the introduction of artificial stone – too little, far too late!

We were invited by Workcover to attend a conference last Friday in Brisbane and the Doctors gave a speech on how it is untreatable but totally preventable (helpful information now). Workplace Health and Safety gave a presentation and showed us how 'proactive' they are! They showed us a wide range of safety equipment they will implement and regulate in the stone cutting industry to ensure the safety of workers. They have

been going in to workplaces and taking measures of the air quality to chart for the past year yet had still not bothered to warn the workers of the dangers. Proactive? Absolutely not! We received no relevant information for 'diagnosed' victims, only a lecture on prevention.

If we were not angry enough prior to the meeting, we sure were after it! They didn't have time for questions surprisingly, pity, I had quite a few.

I still have many questions unanswered such as: -

- How are our medical facilities going to cater for these victims? Dr Hoy said on the 7.30 Report that our hospital system is insufficient to cater for the number of people requiring transplants.
- What is being done to research this epidemic and try to find a cure or at least delay the progress of this disease? Our government owes this to the victims and their families.
- What is being done to promote organ donors in Australia? 'Even though Lung transplants only give an extra 5 – 10 years' (Ms Setches, The Sydney Morning Herald 2 Dec 2017). I suggest a system where people are assumed to be donors unless they register otherwise, which will also render them the lowest priority to receive transplants (fair is fair).
- How can our system tragically fail these workers and their families, dismiss them from work and only pay them 85% of their former salary? Many people are struggling to live and raise young families now, so this is just a further 'kick in the guts' to well-meaning tax payers of Australia who are now facing an undeserved death penalty.
- Why isn't silicosis on the National Register? Nobody knows the magnitude of this tragedy as its not being recorded, hence, nobody has done anything to prevent it, and possibly nothing to assist victims.
- Last but certainly not least – how on earth has this happened and who is being held accountable? The dangers of dust and particularly silica have been known well before the deadly artificial stone was imported, so this should not have been a surprise to anybody. It just blows my mind that we have gone from not only boots but steel cap boots for decades in workshops because we must protect our feet, yet many lungs have been exposed to this deadly disease without any warning whatsoever. I'd rather risk a foot injury any day!

It appears that some authorities have been asleep at the wheel and this should never have happened, I don't believe we should have ever allowed this dangerous artificial stone product into Australia without investigation and strict control. I doubt whether authorities have even considered the long-term disposal of this toxic material. For the amount of lives it has already affected, it should be respectfully banned from import.

Thank you for reading my letter, I look forward to some answers which I think we deserve, and not so forward to my son-in-law and his friends' future of illness, pain and premature death which was totally preventable.

Yours faithfully,
Lynda Eastburn

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