




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNELL

Record of Proceedings, 27 February 2019

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Silicosis

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (9.53 am): The Palaszczuk government continues to lead the nation in responding to the threat of silicosis. On 18 September last year this government immediately banned dry cutting and issued a public health alert about the hazards surrounding unsafe practices with engineered stone. Since then, considerable work has been undertaken by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and WorkCover to meet two priorities: minimise the exposure of workers to silica dust and ensure employers are providing safe workplaces in this industry.

By the end of 2018 my department completed audits of all 138 known engineered stone benchtop fabricators. A total of 562 statutory and infringement notices have been issued by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland for breaches relating to exposure to silica from unsafe work processes, with on-the-spot fines totalling \$36,000 issued. Nine workplaces are currently subject to comprehensive investigations to ensure full compliance with obligations under the act and, once completed, prosecution action may flow. Free health screening for 810 workers in the industry has also been arranged and funded by WorkCover at an estimated cost of \$3 million to \$4 million, with 106 claims accepted to date.

On 9 November a medical forum organised in conjunction with WorkCover was facilitated by US leading international expert Professor Robert Cohen and local expert Dr Ryan Hoy and attracted 40 medical specialists. The aim was to ensure a consistent approach to diagnosis, rehabilitation and treatment for affected workers. An industry forum was held later that day for more than 130 employers and workers from within the industry to raise awareness on required safety standards and supports available to workers. Following the forum, arrangements were made for a medical reference group to be established. Final nominations for this group, which will include leading medical experts in fields such as thoracic, occupational and environmental medicine and radiology, were received late last month. This group will meet next week to consider issues raised with regard to guidance for medical practitioners treating those diagnosed with this terrible disease.

There is still work to do to address the threat of silicosis. WorkCover and the Office of Industrial Relations are committed to working with all medical specialists to ensure workers with silicosis get the best treatments available. The development of new regulations to prohibit dry cutting and grinding along with a code of practice is well advanced and soon to be finalised. I have also written and urged the Morrison government for a national response, including the restriction or control of the importation of engineered stone. However, this request has fallen on deaf ears.

Queensland is leading the nation in addressing this issue, and we will continue to work with all stakeholders to introduce the best health and safety standards to protect workers. We will also ensure that workers diagnosed with silicosis and their families will receive the support they require through our best workers compensation system.