




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNELL

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Silicosis

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (9.54 am): The Palaszczuk government's No. 1 priority is jobs. Not only do we want Queenslanders to have fair and rewarding jobs, we want them to have safe jobs. When the government received advice on the concerning spike in the cases of silicosis in the engineered stone benchtop industry we acted immediately. In September 2018 we issued a total ban on dry cutting and issued a public alert about the risks to workers working with engineered stone. Queensland has led the nation in responding to the threat of silicosis. Audits have now been conducted on all known engineered stone benchtop fabricators in Queensland, with around 600 statutory notices issued and 16 infringement notices with fines totalling over \$54,000.

Health screening has been arranged for over 1,000 workers. Forums for workers, employers and the medical community have occurred and counselling has been arranged for workers and their families. An expert medical working group to develop clinical guidance has been established. Ongoing investigations are occurring in relation to a number of workplaces which may lead to prosecution. A dust lung disease register has been established in Queensland—an Australian first—and a new code of practice is close to finalisation.

I am pleased to announce today the next phase of our response to this insidious disease. I can advise that WorkCover Queensland has provided an \$80,000 research grant and engaged Monash University and the University of Illinois to undertake important research on how we can best support workers who have been diagnosed with silicosis to safely return to work. Professor Malcolm Sim from Monash University and Professor Bob Cohen from the University of Illinois will lead expert teams to address important issues, including the treatment, rehabilitation and retraining options that are available to improve workers' capacity to work, the mental health impact and issues preventing return to work and ensuring the return to work environment is safe to protect workers' long-term health.

Both teams bring extensive experience in the management of dust lung diseases and best practice return-to-work and rehabilitation services. They are involved in research and other initiatives in schemes across Australia and internationally. Their research will ensure that WorkCover Queensland is providing the best support for Queensland workers. This research will also be available publicly to ensure that all schemes are able to benefit from greater knowledge about best practice strategies when dealing with silicosis and other dust lung diseases. The Palaszczuk government remains committed to protecting workers from the scourge of silicosis and dust lung diseases to ensure that WorkCover provides the best rehabilitation support to injured workers and their families across all industries and across all of Queensland.