



Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**


**MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL**

---

Record of Proceedings, 18 September 2019

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Stone Benchtop Industry, Code of Practice**

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (9.51 am): One year ago today, after receiving advice on the troubling spike in cases of silicosis in the engineered stone benchtop fabrication industry, the Palaszczuk government issued a public warning about the risks of working with engineered stone and banned uncontrolled dry cutting. Since then, we have led the nation in responding to the threat of silicosis and today I am pleased to announce we are launching Australia's first code of practice for the stone benchtop industry in the government's next step to combat this insidious disease.

The code, which comes into effect on 31 October 2019, applies to all fabrication, processing, maintenance and removal of engineered and natural stone benchtops. It sets minimum and enforceable standards to ensure silica dust is managed safely and workers are protected. The new code does not impose any new regulatory requirements but simply reinforces the already stringent requirements of the Workplace Health and Safety Act and regulations. The code focuses on dust control measures to eliminate silica, including water suppression and on-tool dust extraction; the use of appropriate respirable protective equipment; air and health monitoring to check dust controls are effective and there are no changes to workers' health; safe onsite installation methods, including in homes; and worker consultations as well as training, education, instruction and supervision of workers.

The code was developed in conjunction with unions, industry associations, medical and technical experts and stone fabrication businesses and has wideranging stakeholder support, and I want to thank the 23 organisations that made up the industry working group which developed the code. Next month, which is also Safe Work Month, the Palaszczuk government will partner with the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists to hold a series of statewide information sessions promoting the code and further raising awareness of the safety and health risks of silica.

We have seen a shift in industry culture. However, we want to see long-term behavioural and cultural change in the industry and we remain focused on doing everything possible to ensure workers exposed to silica are safe in their jobs. As such, this week I have written to the chair of Safe Work Australia to confirm Queensland's support for reducing the workplace exposure standards for silica dust. While higher order engineering controls are what keep our workers safe, exposure standards tell industry what those controls must achieve. We will continue to audit engineered stone fabrication workplaces to ensure the requirements of the code are being met and we will start work on a silica dust code of practice for the construction industry. This government, the Palaszczuk government, will continue to work with all stakeholders in the battle against silicosis. This Queensland code is the first in Australia and we are leading the nation in our efforts to eradicate silicosis to ensure every worker returns home safely after work.