

Question on Notice
No. 282
Asked on 28 February 2008

MS STONE asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)-

QUESTION:

With reference to concerns that have been raised about silica dust from quarries in the Redlands area—

- (1) Has Queensland Health investigated these concerns and, if so, what are the outcomes?
- (2) What is Queensland Health doing to ensure community safety?
- (3) What information should be given to residents in the Cornubia and Shailer Park areas regarding this matter?

ANSWER:

- (1) The health related issue has been the possible release of silica dust from quarrying operations in Redland Shire. Repeated and prolonged exposure over many years to relatively high concentrations of crystalline silica in the air is known to cause a lung disease called silicosis in quarry workers and has also been associated with lung cancer. However, such exposure is unlikely to occur today given modern work practices and development approval conditions and the health risks to the community are regarded as extremely low.

Queensland Health is responsible for providing health related advice to the community and other agencies such as Local Government and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in response to any concerns of risks to public health associated with environmental emissions.

Queensland Health has reviewed data over a 23 year period (1982-2004) and found there to be no significant difference between lung cancer rates in the Brisbane Bayside area and Queensland rates. The most recent cancer registry statistics (2003-2005) identify a small increase in lung cancer rates among older women in the Bayside area. This increase is not observed in males or in the combined population.

Exposure to tobacco smoke is the most significant cause of lung cancer with a lag period between exposure and detection of disease of 20 years or more.

- (2) Queensland Health has responded to community concerns over silica dust emissions from quarries in the Redlands area. In particular, over the next month Queensland Health is participating with the EPA in an air quality monitoring program involving the quarry area to determine dust concentrations at various times and locations surrounding the two quarries in question. The monitoring program will be designed to factor in meteorological conditions and to also capture blasting events at the quarries.

Queensland Health will conduct a health risk assessment of the air quality data collected. In this case, the health risk assessment is the process of estimating the potential public health impact of dust emissions from the quarries on the local community. It is anticipated that the Environmental Protection Agency and Queensland Health will prepare a report on the monitoring program which will be made available to the public on the EPA's internet site and upon request.

Local councils are responsible for quarry development approvals under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

The EPA is responsible for taking regulatory actions in response to community concerns and issues associated with environmental emissions and their impact on the environment, which may impact on human health. The EPA requires quarry operators to implement approved environmental management systems to control environmental emissions such as dust.

- (3) The residents of Cornubia and Shailer Park can be assured there is an extremely low risk of adverse health effects to their community from the quarry operations in the Redlands area. Furthermore, EPA regulation should ensure that the quarries do not present a health risk to the community. The air quality monitoring program being undertaken by the EPA will further inform the health risk assessment and the results of this will be made available.