



NATIONAL OHS ALERT



ENGINEERED STONE AND SILICOSIS

Given the inherent and acknowledged dangers and hazards working with engineered stone, the CFMEU instructs that all cutting and trimming of engineered stone be done off-site in a fully controlled environment.

For members working with engineered stone off- site, remember to ensure that such work is isolated to avoid secondary exposure and that power tools are fitted with either:

- An integrated water delivery system that supplies a continuous feed of water; or
- An on tool extraction system connected to a Dust Class H Vacuum
- Approved and appropriate PPE

This follows recent reports coming out of NSW and QLD that 1-in-5 stonemasons will contract silicosis over their lifetime, with some cases of accelerated silicosis resulting in death within 5 years.

For further information please contact your Branch office or your area organiser, or read our media release.

To access copies of the new codes for working with engineered stone that apply in VIC & QLD, visit:

Victoria: <https://tinyurl.com/viccode>

Queensland: <https://tinyurl.com/qldcode>

ACT (02) 6267 1599
SA (08) 8231 5532

VIC TAS (03) 9341 3444
NSW (02) 9749 0400

QLD NT (07) 3231 4600
WA (08) 9228 6900

When working with engineered stone remember that the hierarchy of controls must be followed in order:

Elimination - Elimination of the risk is the most effective control measure and must be implemented, as far as reasonably practical, before all other control measures are considered. For example, using products that do not contain crystalline silica would eliminate the hazard completely.

Substitute - Substitution involves replacing a hazardous substance with a less hazardous substance. When working with engineered stone it may not be possible to eliminate the risk associated with crystalline silica, however working with materials that have a lower crystalline silica content will reduce the risk.

Isolate –

- a) Where possible, employers should use isolated automated wet machines for cutting, grinding, trimming or polishing engineered stone. If automation is not reasonably practical other isolation measures, such as completing work outside, should only be used in combination with engineered controls.
- b) Where minor modifications of engineered stone benchtops at an installation site are unavoidable, the work needs to be undertaken in a controlled and well ventilated exclusion zone, with access restricted to people involved in the task.

Engineering controls -

- a) Water suppression - involves using water at the point of dust generation to dampen down or suppress dust before it is released into the air. Water suppression may be in-built as an automated control in large machinery, or integrated into hand-held power tools.
- b) Local exhaust ventilation: on-tool extraction - this removes dust as it is being produced. It is a type of local exhaust ventilation system which is fitted directly onto the tool. The system includes a captor hood fitted over the dust generation point. The hood captures the dust as it is produced and transports it through a hose to an extraction unit (Dust Class H vacuum).
- c) Other forms of local exhaust ventilation - hoods, booths or extraction walls extract airborne dust from processing areas. While these controls may reduce background levels of airborne silica they do not adequately reduce exposure for employees performing high exposure tasks - on-tool controls should be used.

Administrative controls - If a risk remains after implementing the above, higher order controls, an employer must reduce the risk using administrative controls. These include considering workshop layout, planning to make the minimum number of cuts for each job, good housekeeping and rotating employees between high exposure and low exposure tasks.

Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) - RPE must be provided to a person who is undertaking cutting, grinding, trimming or polishing of engineered stone. RPE should be used in addition to (and not as a substitute) to the adoption of appropriate engineering controls and should be compliant with standard AZ/ NZS 1716 - Respiratory protective devices.