

Ending silicosis through reducing harmful exposures and banning the use of deadly engineered stone

The ACTU Executive **notes** the concerning rise in silicosis in recent years and the failure of governments to take stronger action to protect workers. Silicosis is a debilitating, incurable and fatal occupational disease caused by exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS).

More than 600,000 workers in Australia are exposed to RCS at work. This includes workers in mining, quarrying, building & construction, tunnelling and manufacturing. Research estimates that if these exposures are not significantly reduced it is likely that over the course of this century we will see as many as 100,000 workers diagnosed with silicosis and a further 11,000 diagnosed with cancer. Scientific and medical evidence has found that even when workers cut and fabricate low silica stone products it generates significant amounts of very fine particles of silica that are able to penetrate deep into the lungs of workers and cause disease.

ACTU Executive **notes** that as many as 1 in 4 stonemasons that work with engineered stone have been diagnosed with silicosis. In many of these cases their disease is so significant that it continues to progress even after their employment and exposure ceases.

This is not acceptable. Manufacturers have known about these risks for decades and have failed to take steps, or even warn workers, of the risks associated with their use.

ACTU Executive **welcomes** the recent decision of WHS Ministers to increase the protections for all workers exposed to silica and to commission Safe Work Australia to undertake an assessment of the options to ban the use of engineered stone, and **urges** state, territory and commonwealth governments to take all steps necessary to end harmful exposures. However, safe working conditions workers enjoy today were not given to us by governments or bosses – they were fought for and won by workers and their unions.

ACTU Executive **endorses** the CFMEU Construction & General Division's campaign *Stop this Killer Stone*. All affiliates are called upon to publicly support the campaign demand to ban the importation, manufacture and use of engineered stone products in Australia from 1 July 2024.

If government bans are not in place by 1 July 2024, ACTU Executive **urges** affiliates to take all steps necessary to **take action** to support bans at the workplace level, in order to ensure the safe working conditions of working Australians.

ACTU Executive also calls on all affiliates to do all things necessary to demand the following:

- the introduction of a national health monitoring and silicosis screening for workers exposed to respirable crystalline silica; and
- adequate compensation and support for affected workers.

The ACTU Executive **stands in solidarity** with all workers and their unions who have been fighting this disease. Unions commit to taking whatever steps necessary to end the use of engineered stone in Australia.

ACTU Executive **encourages** Trades and Labour Councils, affiliates and branches to also consider and adopt this resolution.

Moved:

Seconded: