

24 October 2023

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Hon Grace Grace MP
Minister for Education, Industrial Relations and Racing
PO Box 15033
CITY EAST QLD 4002

by email: industrialrelations@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Dear Minister

UPCOMING WHS MINISTERS' MEETING – SILICA-RELATED MATTERS

I am writing in relation to the upcoming WHS Ministers' meeting to discuss a potential model regulatory approach to respirable crystalline silica ('RCS') and the use of engineered stone products.

Master Builders has long supported the view that silica-related diseases are preventable and must be comprehensively addressed in those industries where there is a high-risk of accelerated silicosis and occupational lung diseases.

Master Builders acknowledge that in Queensland we currently have two codes of practice dealing with RCS, and that Queensland is leading the way in terms of regulation around the use of RCS in building products.

From our work with RCS researchers, we know that it is imperative to have education about the risks and how to work safely so as to protect workers who will inevitably be working with it in homes during renovations, as well as homeowners conducting DIY work.

RCS is contained in many other construction materials, including natural stone (granite and sandstone) as well as concrete and cement, bricks, and fibre cement products, so it is vital workers are taught how to safely work without exposing themselves to silica risks, and that businesses understand how to control the risk to workers. In Queensland, this is outlined in our codes of practice.

Notwithstanding, any changes to WHS laws in relation to the management and control of RCS could give rise to real and significant impacts on businesses, particularly those that are small to medium sized.

Master Builders agrees that something must be done to address the risk of RCS exposure. However, we do not support an immediate ban on the importation of engineered stone products without an appropriate transition, adequate alternative products, and support for building industry businesses. It needs to be recognised that engineered stone and other commonly used building products containing RCS are currently being used and will need to be used and worked with, well into the future.

HEAD OFFICE

417 Wickham Tce, Brisbane Qld 4000

T (07) 3225 6444

F (07) 3225 6545

mbql.com.au

We commend the Federal Government and State Ministers for seeking to address the issue in a nationally coordinated way. However, we would emphasise the importance of ensuring that any regulatory reform is targeted, practical and delivers tangible safety outcomes for the entire industry. We would welcome the opportunity to contribute to any future consultation on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Bidwell
CEO