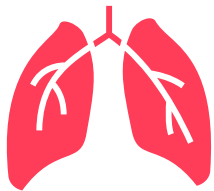




How to identify the hazards that can cause occupational lung diseases

ENGINEERED STONE:

Silica dust in an engineered stone benchtop factory



Lee runs a small business fabricating stone benchtops. At the factory, workers use power tools on the stone slabs to make kitchen and bathroom benchtops. Most of the benchtops are made from engineered stone. Lee knows that engineered stone products can contain over 90% respirable crystalline silica (silica). The high amount of silica means that there is a very high risk of her workers developing breathing problems, and even silicosis, if they breathe in the dust generated from modifying the engineered stone slabs.



Look at your workplace

Lee understands that as a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), she has a duty under work health and safety (WHS) laws to keep workers safe from the risks of exposure to silica dust. She has implemented work practices that use wet cutting, on tool dust extraction and half face respirators.



Talk and consult with your workers

Lee regularly monitors the workplace to see if there are visible dusts on machinery, tools or on workers' clothing. She knows that as well as the visible dusts, there may be small dust particles that aren't visible but can still be breathed in and cause lung diseases. Lee also regularly consults and talks to her workers about the work environment.



Engage a professional

To find out more about the dust particles that are being generated in her workplace, Lee finds a certified occupational hygienist to carry out air monitoring and identify the different sizes of dusts being generated and just how much is in the air.



The air monitoring report tells Lee that the dusts being generated at her workplace are in the respirable size, meaning if they are breathed in, they can go deep into her workers' lungs. The report also tells her that she is not exceeding the workplace exposure limit of 0.05 mg/m³ of respirable dusts and that her engineering controls are working well.

The certified occupational hygienist also completes respiratory protective equipment (RPE) fit testing for Lee's workers, so she knows that the respirators are working as they should for each worker. Lee's workers have completed training in RPE to ensure they know how to protect themselves when conducting their work.

Talk with your WHS regulator

Lee seeks professional advice from her WHS regulator to check she is doing everything she can to minimise her workers' exposure to silica dust. She engages the certified occupational hygienist to regularly conduct air monitoring. She also organises for her workers to have health monitoring to check any effects on their lungs.



Not all workplace hazards are visible