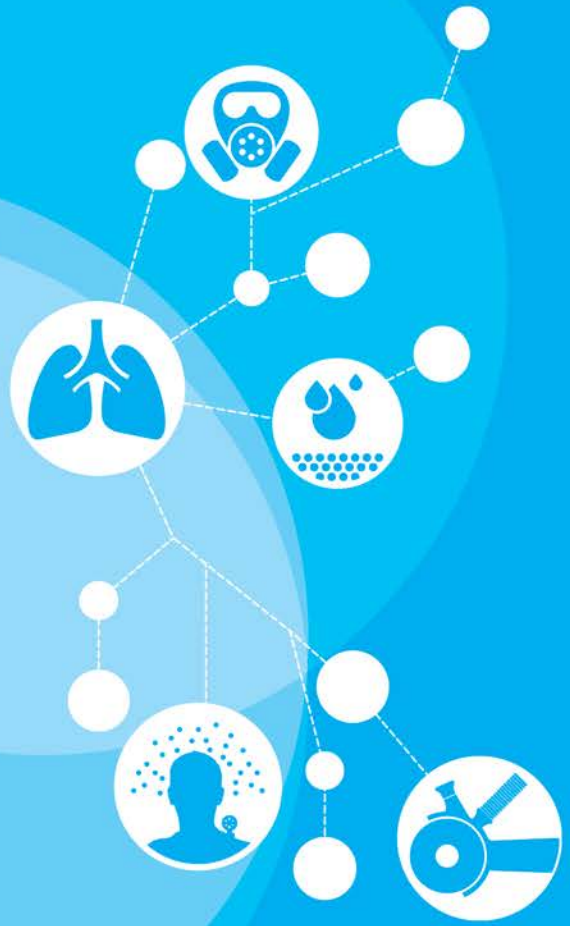


The Regulator’s response to occupational lung disease

worksafe.qld.gov.au

Queensland Government

Support services

Both employers and workers in the stone benchtop industry have been affected by silicosis

If you are an affected person or know an affected person support is available

www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/silicosis or 1300 362 128

counselling.support@oir.qld.gov.au

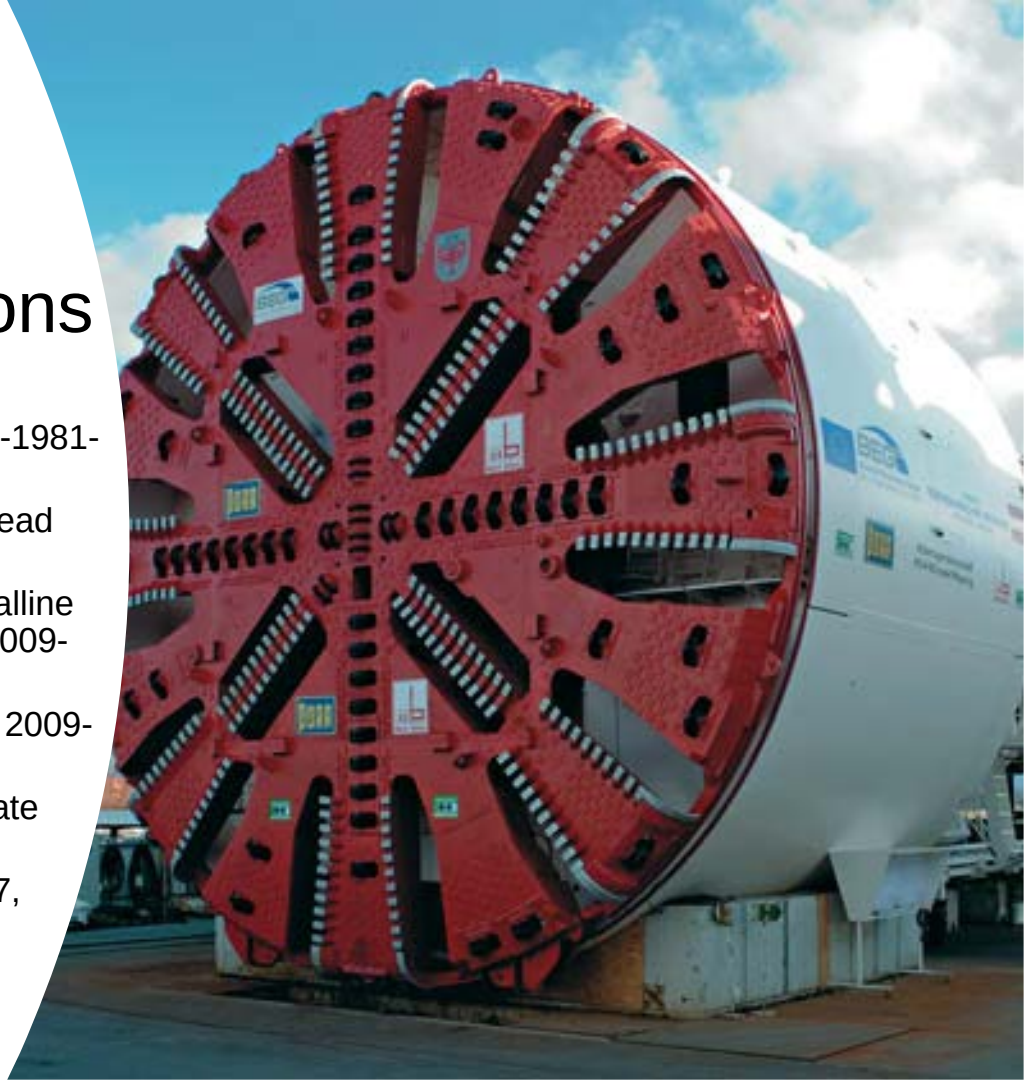
Or call the independent, confidential and free Workers' Psychological Support Service on 1800 370 732

Occupational lung disease

- Workers diagnosed with silica-related diseases such as accelerated silicosis has increased significantly over the last 12-18 months
- Stone benchtop industry in Qld over past 2 years
  - 172 accepted claims for silicosis
  - 24 workers with progressive massive fibrosis
- Stone benchtop industry in Qld during previous 2 decades
  - 2 accepted claims for silicosis

Past proactive atmospheric dust monitoring interventions

- Foundries - respirable crystalline silica -1981-2002 and 2009
- Radiator repair workshops - inorganic lead dust - 2003-2004
- Construction industry - respirable crystalline silica - various construction projects - 2009-2012
- Timber-related industries - wood dust - 2009-2010
- Road traffic controllers - diesel particulate matter – 2015
- Tunnelling projects – Airport link, Clem7, Legacy Way



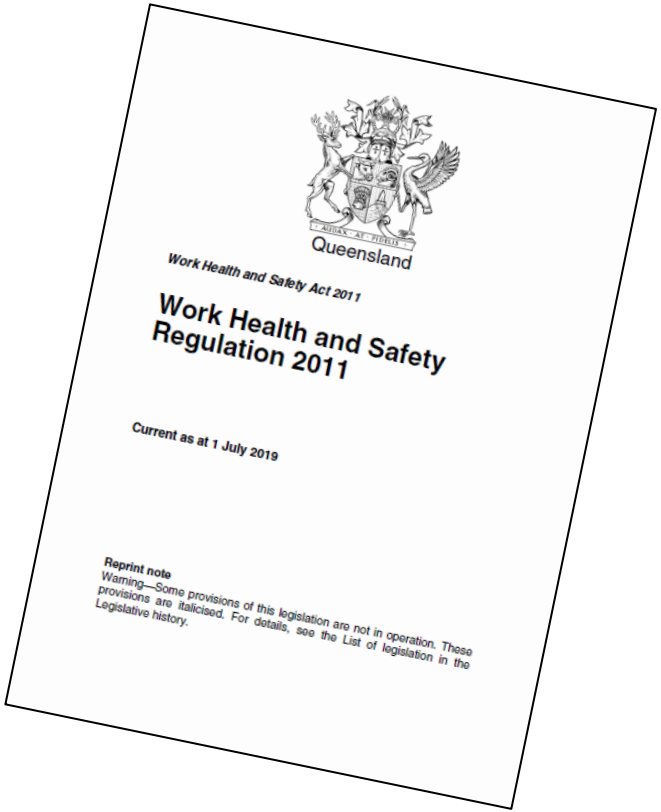
Existing health and safety laws

WHS Act

- General duties section 19 of the WHS Act

WHS Regulation

- not exceed the WES for airborne contaminants
- provide health monitoring for workers
- review and revise control measures put in place to manage the risks
- provide supervision necessary to protect a worker from risks arising from working with hazardous materials


Queensland

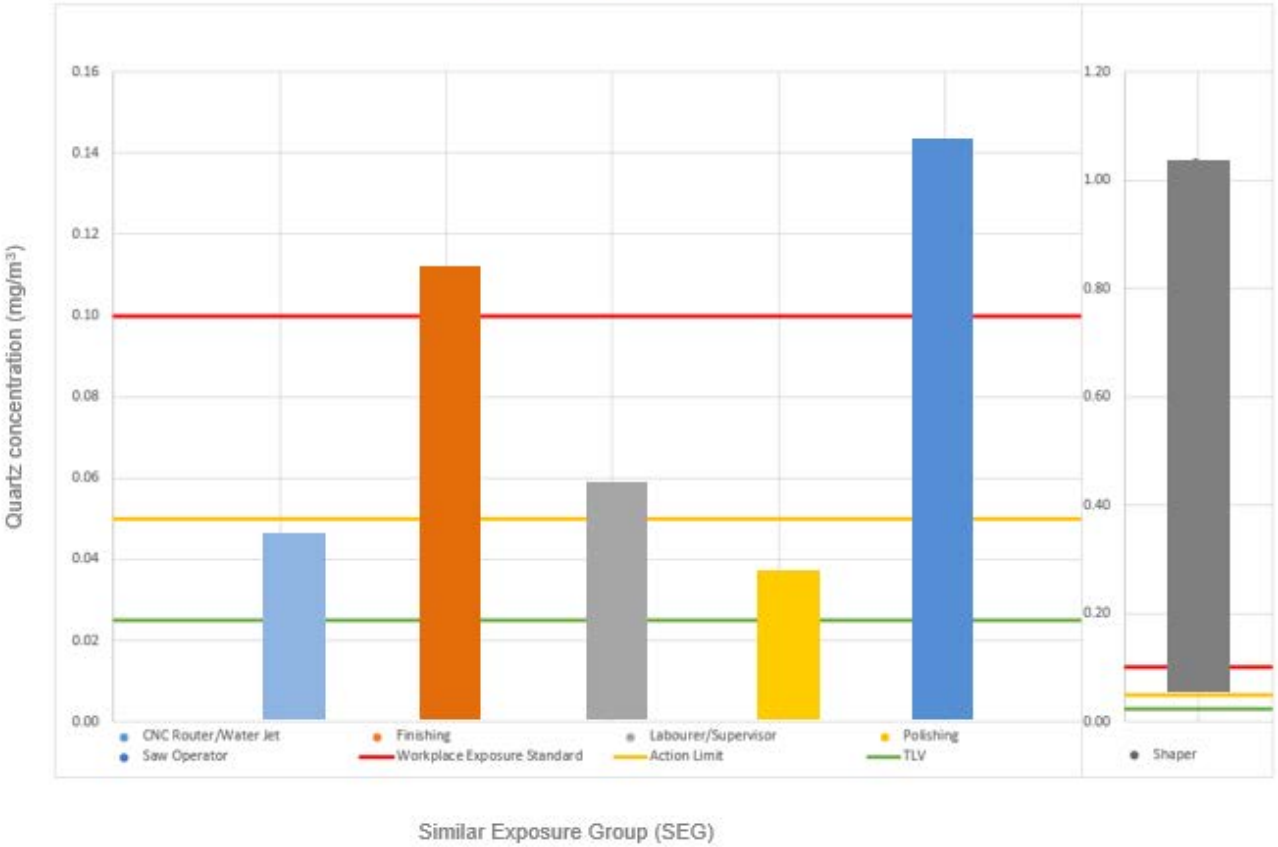
Work Health and Safety Act 2011

Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011

Current as at 1 July 2019

Reprint note
Warning—Some provisions of this legislation are not in operation. These provisions are italicised. For details, see the List of legislation in the Legislative history.

Personal sampling results



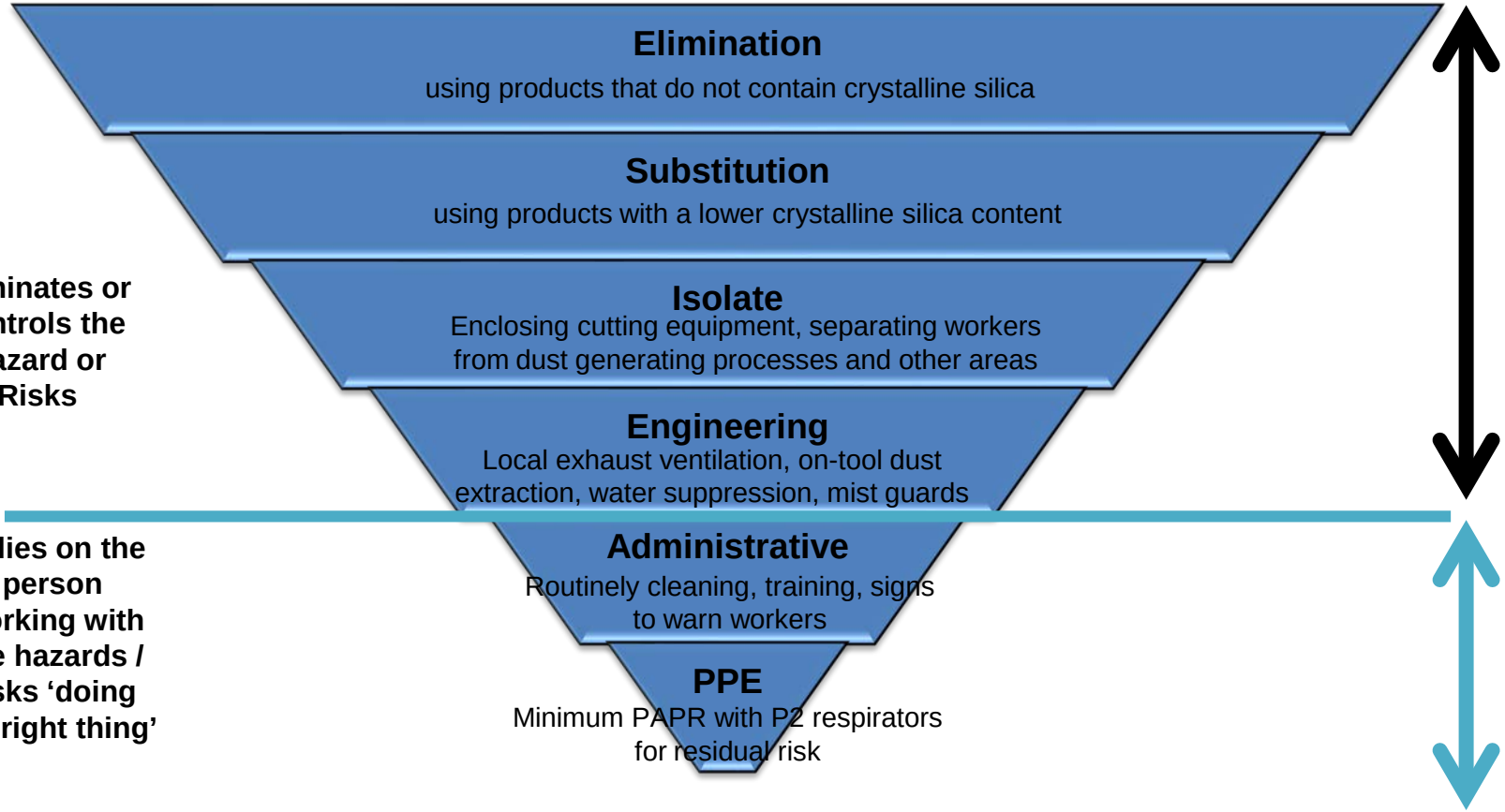
Phase 1 compliance audits

- Uncontrolled dry processing (cutting, grinding or polishing)
- Insufficient housekeeping practices, evidenced by a build-up of dust on floors, walls and other surfaces
- Poor fitting respiratory protective equipment in use, or respiratory protective equipment was not worn by workers
- No personal exposure (air) monitoring or health monitoring conducted at any sites
- Water suppression does not eliminate dust completely

Common improvements

- Awareness about respirable crystalline silica dust risks
- Increased investment in new technologies and equipment leading to reduced reliance on hand-held tools for cut outs
- Prevention of water spray containing silica dust
- Housekeeping and regular cleaning
- Respiratory protection worn by workers
- Health monitoring completed for workers involved in fabrication and installation

Code approach – healthy by design



Lessons about prevention from stone benchtop industry

- Over reliance on lower order controls like RPE - no routine consideration of higher order risk controls to design out the risk (e.g. automated processes)
- Persistent lack of perception about the risk - often no real visual clues about the existence of the hazard - need for improved education and awareness, training of workers
- Industry did not understand the importance of taking action now to prevent to avoid illness in the future – air monitoring is necessary to understand the extend of risk
- Health monitoring – importance of early detection

Queensland’s response to date

- Funding initial health screenings – current/former fabrication workers
- Support for affected workers and their families
- Support for an immediate reduction in the WES for respirable crystalline silica
- Guideline for assessing engineered stone workers to support medical experts
- Changes to workers’ compensation laws to ensure workers, including those diagnosed with silicosis are able to access latent onset terminal benefits when they need it most
- International research to examine support for workers diagnosed with silicosis
- Advocacy of an investigation by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission into product safety of imported engineered stone
- Queensland Notifiable Dust Lung Disease Register
- Cross jurisdictional collaboration and information sharing – New Zealand and California

Workplace Exposure Standards

- National review of WES commenced in 2018 with priority reviews – respirable coal dust and respirable crystalline silica
- 700 chemicals to be reviewed during 2019-2020
- Draft evaluation reports for each chemical – public comment sought
- 168 draft evaluation reports now released
- Standard 3 year transitional period proposed for new WES list once agreed nationally
- More information www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au

What’s next

- Code of practice - managing respirable crystalline silica dust exposure in the construction industry
- Regulatory framework while robust is difficult for small operators to understand – need for explicit regulations
- Commissioning further research – greater understanding of dust exposures and controls in general construction
- Re-audit of stone bench top fabrication business in 2020
- Bush fire health risk for workplace – advice underway
- Specific strategy to address key occupational health risks – using longitudinal data on current and emerging risks as part of a health surveillance framework