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INFORMATION BULLETIN

Silicosis health concerns linked to stone processing

Recent pieces in the media have talked about the disease “Silicosis” in relation to stone products used in the building industry.

What is Silicosis and how can you develop it?

Silicosis is a disease of the lung. Construction workers may be at risk if they work without dust controls and appropriate safety measures in conditions where high concentrations of quartz dust are present. Jackhammering old concrete, excavating on a construction site or close up work cutting and processing products containing quartz such as fabricating slabs of engineered stone or granite in a factory are examples of where dust management is an important consideration to manage this potential hazard. Wearing respiratory protection (dust masks with a particulate filter in them), local exhaust ventilation and wet cutting processes all work to minimise the risk to workers of contracting this disease.

What products are linked to Silicosis?

Silica is a mineral found in the earth’s crust. The crystalline form of silica is called “Quartz” and is a very common ingredient used for many building materials. Quartz is found in concrete, road base (asphalt), clay bricks and masonry items, terracotta tiles and pavers, sandstone, glass, granite, fibre cement sheets and engineered quartz stone products.

The recent media articles have focussed on stone, particularly granite & engineered stone where the main ingredient is often “Quartz”. There is no inherent Silicosis risk from the installed material within the home or office/commercial premises as dust is not emitted from the finished product.

Safety of workers

Laminex as a supplier of essastone slabs takes safety very seriously. As a responsible supplier, all of our stone mason customers who are involved in the cutting and processing/installing of the essastone products are provided quality information with regard to WH&S procedures recommended for minimising dust in the workplace. This is found in the essastone fabrication manual supplied to all stone masons ahead of purchasing the essastone product. Copies are available from your Laminex representative or download from the Laminex website: Laminex.com.au

Safety in your stone workshop

Worker safety is imperative. All cutting, grinding, shaping, polishing and profiling of stone slabs conducted in the workshop should take place using water-fed process. This includes the use of hand tools. Dust exhaust units will assist to minimize air borne dust particles.

All workers should be provided with and wear a particulate filter dust mask always when in the factory environment where stone processing is taking place.

Safety at consumer premises – site cutting

Cutting of small sink and hotplate openings on site by a stone mason may sometimes occur to ensure the accuracy of these fittings. Stone masons should use a wet cut procedure (e.g. employing a garden hose feed into their hand tools) while cutting to minimize the dust and never commence cutting whilst in a confined space. Dust masks with a particulate filter should be worn always during the cutting of stone for the operator working in the immediate area.