

# Media Release

**Ingrid Stitt MP**  
Minister for Workplace Safety  
Minister for Early Childhood



Sunday, 28 February 2021

## SILICA HEALTH ASSESSMENTS REACH ONE THOUSAND

More than 1,000 workers from the stonemason industry have now registered for a free health check-up as part of the Andrews Labor Government's action plan to protect workers from deadly silica dust.

The free health screenings were established in May 2019 for an estimated 1,400 past and present workers in the Victorian stonemason industry.

Stonemasons are at a high risk due to the cutting and polishing of artificial stone which contains high concentrations of crystalline silica. Exposure to silica dust can lead to deadly lung and respiratory diseases, including silicosis.

The early identification of a respiratory disease through the check-up program means workers facing this deadly disease can receive the treatment they need as soon as possible.

While reaching this registration milestone is significant, tragically there has been 129 workers diagnosed with silica related diseases since the beginning of the program in 2019.

A fast-tracked compensation process is in place for affected workers and their families so they can get the personalised treatment and support they need.

The government's action plan includes the development of Australia's first licensing scheme for engineered stone, a state-wide ban on the uncontrolled dry cutting of the product, and being the only jurisdiction to immediately adopt the new, reduced Workplace Exposure Standard for crystalline silica.

The plan also includes reaching out to workers whose first language is Vietnamese, Cantonese, Italian or Mandarin with dedicated in-language information highlighting the risks of working with engineered stone.

A tough enforcement blitz has seen more than 1,000 silica related visits to workplaces since 1 July 2019 and WorkSafe inspectors issuing more than 450 compliance notices ordering employers to improve their safeguards against exposure to deadly silica dust.

Find more information about the health screening program, visit [worksafe.vic.gov.au/crystalline-silica](https://worksafe.vic.gov.au/crystalline-silica).

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Workplace Safety Ingrid Stitt

*"A diagnosis of silicosis or associated illness can have a devastating impact on workers and their families. Our free health assessments mean those diagnosed with this deadly disease get the treatment they need as soon as possible."*

*"We're making sure employers are protecting their workers against this devastating disease, with workplace compliance visits happening regularly to ensure all steps are taken to safeguard against exposure to silica dust."*

*"I encourage all past and present stonemasons who haven't yet registered for a free health assessment to do so as soon as possible – it could save your life."*