

Statement of [REDACTED]

I am a member of the Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia (adfa). For 33 years I worked as a stonemason for a range of companies installing kitchen bench tops fabricated from manufactured stone.

I have [REDACTED] children aged between 10 and 18 years old, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I have stage 3 silicosis. I am presently living on a dust diseases fortnightly benefit.

On 11 November 2022 a little after 11 AM I was at the [REDACTED] Marketplace when I noticed four workers cutting manufactured stone inside a [REDACTED] coffeeshop. The store was adjacent to the main front doors of the shopping centre. The front doors of the shop were open. I noticed that the workers were not wearing personal protective equipment and were dry cutting the stone. I noticed that the air around the workers was thick with dust. I saw that the ground around the workers was covered in dust and I could see footprints in the dust where the workers were walking. The dust extended out of the [REDACTED] coffeeshop and into the air of the shopping centre foyer area where I can also see dust was thick on the floor.

Because of my personal experience with dust disease I became concerned about the health and well-being of these workers and members of the public in the shopping centre. I tried to talk to the workers however there were language difficulties and I was not able to effectively communicate with them about what was going on. I think the workers spoke Chinese. I took a photograph. By this time the workers were standing around and the dust was settling, and the workers went away. I went and knocked on the door of the shopping centre management however no one was there. I then rang [REDACTED] at ADFA and [REDACTED] told me to call SafeWork NSW.

I telephoned the SafeWork NSW complaints line and spoke to a call centre operator. I said, "I'm at the [REDACTED] Marketplace, they're cutting engineered stone in the shopping centre and dust is everywhere, there are mothers with prams and elderly people with walking frames, you need to get someone out here."

The call centre operator said they needed information and then I spent a long time answering a detailed list of questions which I answered. I was becoming frustrated about how long this was taking and said, "You really just need to get someone out here now." When the discussion ended the call centre operator said, "We'll be in contact with you." There was no indication about how long it would take for someone to get in touch but I made it clear someone needed to get out there right then and there.

After the phone conversation with the SafeWork complaints line I was not confident that SafeWork were going to attend, I rang the fire brigade and told them. I also rang the police. I also rang the local council and was told that while they may try and get someone out there, as the incident was happening on private property there was nothing they could do.

Three days later I received a phone call from a SafeWork inspector. He said, "We're short staffed, I'm the only inspector in the area. I went down to the site earlier today but there was no one there and the shopfront was locked up. It's too late, there's nothing we can do unless we catch them in the act. We just don't have the resources to get on site while these things are happening."

I provide this information on the basis that I am not complaining about the SafeWork inspector himself. I am more concerned about the way these complaints are handed by SafeWork as an organisation.

I have serious concerns about continuing use of manufactured stone as a product. The vast majority of the time that I worked with the product I was not provided with personal protective equipment and dry cutting occurred. When the stone is being cut at manufacturing sites they may have vacuum machines to reduce the level of dust. But when this work is being done on site cutting this usually occurs in an uncontrolled way which exposes workers and members of the public to harmful dust.

Manufactured stone needs to be banned as a product and building material.



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