



Department of Consumer
and Employment Protection
Government of Western Australia

WorkSafe

Your Ref:

5 August 2005

Our Ref: 108293

Enquiries: Leona Glasby

Mr Elton Humphrey
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Humphrey

Thank you for your letter dated 4 July 2005 regarding an inquiry into workplace exposure to toxic dust.

WorkSafe submits the following comments with respect to the terms of reference:

- a) *The health impacts of workplace exposure to toxic dust including exposure to silica in sandblasting and other occupations.*

WorkSafe acknowledges the health impacts of workplace exposure to toxic dust, including exposure to silica, sandblasting and other occupations.

- b) *The adequacy and timeliness of regulation governing workplace exposure, safety precautions and the effectiveness of techniques used to assess airborne dust concentrations.*

In Western Australia the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996 specify a number of requirements for the identification, assessment and control of hazards in relation to toxic substances in the atmosphere, including possible means of reducing the risk, respiratory protective equipment generally, and supplied air respirators required for certain atmospheres.

Following the recent National Occupational Safety and Health Commission (NOHSC) declaration of the revised national exposure standards for three forms of crystalline silica (quartz, cristobalite and tridymite), Western Australia amended the regulations to refer to the revised standards.

A survey of improvement and prohibition notices issued by WorkSafe between 1 January 2000 and 28 July 2005 showed that a total of 729 notices relating to dust were issued during this period. Of these, approximately 89% (648) notices dealt with the control or assessment of dusts in relation to health or inhalation exposure.

The notices dealt with various specific types of dust hazards including (but not limited to): wood dust & MDF dust; asbestos; nuisance/general dust; construction work dust; silica, marble dust; brick dust; lead dust; powder; grain & hay dust; brake dust (from vehicles); fly ash; aluminium dust; dust created when employees blow themselves down with compressed air; abrasive blasting dust and organic or animal dust.

./2

- c) *The extent to which employers and employees are informed of the risk of workplace dust inhalation.*

The Commission for Occupational Safety and Health has produced the following publications in relation to various types of dust:

- Code of Practice for Abrasive Blasting;
- Code of Practice: Concrete and Masonry Cutting and Drilling;
- Guidance Note: Controlling Wood Dust Hazards at Work; and
- Guidance Note: Asbestos Materials in the Automotive Maintenance and Repair Industry.

In addition, WorkSafe has published a number of information sheets about inhalable dusts associated with substances such as flour, lead and fibreglass.

WorkSafe has also planned an information campaign relating to the new exposure standards, in which workplaces will be informed of their duty to comply with the new standard. The likely industries to be addressed include (but are not limited to): construction – including brick and tile cutting and chasing of walls and floors as well as electricians and plumbers working with concrete based materials, assay laboratories and local councils.

- d) *The availability of accurate diagnoses and medical services for those affected and the financial and social burden of such conditions.*

WorkSafe acknowledges the importance of accurate diagnoses and the availability of medical services for those affected.

- e) *The availability of accurate records on the nature and extent of illness, disability and death, diagnosis, morbidity and treatment.*

WorkSafe recognises the difficulties associated with collecting reliable data associated with toxic dust exposure, and is working with NOHSC to improve the availability and quality of data according to the National Data Action Plan.

- f) *Access to compensation, limitations in seeking legal redress and alternative models of financial support for affected individuals and their families.*

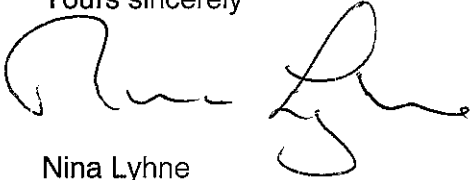
In Western Australia, WorkCover WA administers the *Workers Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981*.

- g) *The potential of emerging technologies, including nanoparticles, to result in workplace related harm.*

WorkSafe supports the work undertaken by NOHSC to identify and monitor the health impacts of emerging technologies such as nanoparticles.

WorkSafe supports the inquiry and the ongoing need for concern about silica and other toxic dusts. Should you require further information, please contact Leona Glasby, Information Analyst/Policy Officer, on (08) 9327 8623, or email lglasby@docep.wa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nina Lyhne', written in a cursive style.

Nina Lyhne
COMMISSIONER WORKSAFE WESTERN AUSTRALIA