

Dear Senator Humphries.

Is the senate committee established to investigate silicosis looking into the plight of residents and communities who are living in close proximities to dust producing industries? The industry of concern to me is open cut mining.

We have been able to find out that the production of 2.5 particulate matter is on the increase in the Hunter Valley in NSW and is raising concerns amongst various government parties. It has been established by studies that this dust is being generated entirely by the open cut coal mining activities in the Upper Hunter Valley. It has been established that the larger component of this dust of 2.5 particulate matter or finer is silica. There is no human health related studies on this issue in the Upper Hunter Valley. There has been some studies conducted in the lower Hunter Valley which demonstrate a link between the increase in 2.5 particulate matter and respiratory illness. It is very early days yet and nothing is being done to ensure we are not the next generation of people with a disease creating social and financial burdens on the country.

Howard Bridgeman Associate Professor, Clean Air and Environmental Quality School of Environmental and Life Sciences University of Newcastle has conducted some studies in the Upper Hunter Valley area but his expertise is identifying the components of the dust not its human health impacts. I urge you to contact him and to that end I have included his contact details at the end of this email.

There is an interesting article in the Sun Herald September 4 2005 on page 53 and 56 of the Sunday extra section, all about the insidious disease of silicosis. The story concentrates on the facts of employees that are suffering from the disease, mostly past sandblasters etc. skirts briefly on the Minerals Council and mining industry not having much data on the disease nor its contribution to it.

Unfortunately the article missed any discussion on the potential health impacts of the population of the entire Hunter Valley and in particular the Upper Hunter residents living in the shadows of mining bund walls, who are daily and increasingly existing in air that is polluted with soil dust from the actions of very close by open cut mining, the largest component of this finer dust being silica.

These open cut coal mines are on land with known silica based soil profiles from sandstone, shales and conglomerates.

This becomes the overburden that is disturbed by blasting, dozing, trucking and dumping and all the other dust contributing actions that ends up as the fine dust hanging in our air. Its not just harmless soil or nuisance dirt that gets on our furniture and cars.

Our past experiences of a dusty sky on the days with a temperature inversion as an anomaly have gone. Muswellbrook community is constantly living in a dust effected atmosphere. The Hunter Valley is dying and so I suspect are its inhabitants, we just do not know it yet, but we are starting to wonder. There is much discussion if today's

residents of the Hunter Valley will not be the next Asbestosis type sufferers and compensation seekers in the future.

Looking to you to use due diligence in referring this to the senate committee and in researching this matter.

Yours sincerely

Christine Phelps