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MinEx is seeking to dispel community concerns over harmful levels of RCS in quarry dust emissions. Image courtesy: PRPower

SILICOSIS CONCERNS GROUNDLESS, SAYS EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY CHIEF

Posted February 12, 2018 | By Talia Paz • Staff Journalist

Recent elevated concern about the presence of crystalline silica in quarry dust samples has prompted the New Zealand extractive industry's national safety body to address the matter directly.

As previously reported by *Quarry*, the saga began after two independent tests conducted in 2017 purportedly indicated traces of respirable crystalline silica (RCS) in dust samples from Winstone Aggregates' Yaldhurst quarry, in the Canterbury region on the South Island. RCS is known to contribute to the irreversible lung disease silicosis if inhaled over a significant period of time.

In December 2017, Fulton Hogan announced its intentions to develop a 170ha site in Templeton, west of Christchurch, while building materials supplier James Hardie applied to quarry one million cubic metres of silica sand over 35 years at a site in Auckland. Local residents of both potential quarry sites have voiced their concerns over the potential adverse health effects of the quarries' dust emissions after reading reports about the Yaldhurst quarry.

However, Wayne Scott, a Past IQA President and now CEO of the National Health and Safety Council for the NZ Mining and Quarry Sector



"MinEx is active in working to ensure workers are protected by the control of dust emerging in quarry operations."

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(MinEx), stated the silicosis fears were unfounded.

Wayne Scott, MinEx CEO



"We need to dispel some of the myths that quarry dust is laden with RCS," Scott told *Quarry*, adding that testing to date had shown no evidence RCS was present at any harmful levels.

"New Zealand's limit on RCS is 0.1mg per cubic metre," Scott said. "Any risk of RCS exposure is to quarry workers, not neighbours who most often are hundreds of metres from a quarry face with a huge amount of air space between them. MinEx is currently working with WorkSafe [NZ] to continue reducing any risk to quarry workers.

"Another round of monitoring is being undertaken by [Environment Canterbury] at some Canterbury quarries which by mid-year I expect to confirm that RCS is virtually undetectable and no serious health risks arise.

"Some residents should get some comfort from that even if others are still seeing things from an emotional perspective," he added.

Dust management

Scott conceded that while most New Zealand quarries have good dust management practices in place, there are still some operations that need "to lift their game because any dust that emerges from a quarry ... is annoying to close neighbours".

"Dust needs to be better managed by some New Zealand quarries," Scott said. "[MinEx] accepts that dust from any source – not just quarries – can cause health issues such as sore throats and nasal bleeding.

"MinEx is active in working to ensure workers are protected by the control of dust emerging in quarry operations."

MinEx represents New Zealand's mining and quarrying industry on matters such as health and safety legislation, regulations, guidelines and training. In late 2017, the organisation released advice for workers on how to minimise their [exposure to RCS](#) and to [manage other safety considerations](#) in the extractive industry, including risk assessment, exposure and health monitoring, and controls.

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