



The AQA's new chair Jared Johnston (left) and deputy Mike Higgins have vowed to overturn ECan's decision to introduce mandatory full-time dust monitoring at quarries in the Canterbury region.

INDUSTRY POISED FOR DUST BATTLE

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To the dismay of the New Zealand extractive industry, a regulator on the South Island is set to enforce compulsory dust monitoring on quarries within 500m of residences.

The Kiwi quarrying industry, represented by the Aggregate and Quarry Association (AQA) and the National Health and Safety Council for the NZ Extractives Sector (MinEx), will lobby against a compulsory dust monitoring regime to be introduced in the Canterbury region in December this year.

Environment Canterbury (ECan) has announced that as of 1 December, all consented Canterbury operations within 500m of homes must install continuous dust monitors on their boundaries. Operators will have to make the data available to ECan and will be required to inform the regional council in the event of a breach.

The policy has been introduced after ECan, in response to complaints from residents, completed a four-month monitoring program adjacent to quarries in Yaldhurst, near Christchurch, that tested for traces of harmful respirable crystalline silica (RCS) in the ambient dust emissions.

The results conclusively proved that while there were minor traces of RCS in the dust emissions, they were well below prescribed international guidelines and posed no health risks to residents or quarry workers.

Brian Roche, the outgoing AQA chairman, has labelled the ECan policy 'unprecedented'. He argued compulsory monitoring will be a burden on small quarries that do not crush aggregate and therefore generate little dust. He has encouraged quarries to seek legal advice about the policy.



'Knee-jerk' reaction

MinEx CEO Wayne Scott told Quarry he endorsed a move by the industry to protest the proposal for strict enforcement of dust levels in Canterbury, given the results of ECan's own investigation, and would 'be attempting to meet with ECan in the near future' to challenge the new requirements.

Scott, an Institute of Quarrying Australia past president, described the new regulations as a 'knee-jerk' reaction by the authorities wilting under pressure from residents and environmental groups.

He said quarry dust monitoring regimes in Australia and New Zealand were very similar, with the latter using the Australian Standard 2985 for exposure monitoring.

He said ECan had not raised the potential for such monitoring at any stage, despite a number of discussions he had with the regulator.

'We were first alerted to it [dust monitoring] in the press release that accompanied the release of dust monitoring results,' Scott said.

'I have challenged ECan to provide evidence that dust measured at any building site, factory, farm gate, unsealed road or quarry had an impact on residents 500m away in any direction.

'I will also be asking ECan to tell us what particulate matter was in the samples on the very few occasions that PM10 limits were exceeded at Yaldhurst and what are the potential sources of that particulate,' he added.

'Quarries are not the only generators of dust and I believe an analysis of samples taken during the Yaldhurst dust monitoring program would have shown multiple sources of the PM10 particulate,' Scott said, adding that PM10 was defined as containing combustion particles, organic matter, metals, sulphate, nitrates, sea salt and dust.

The most common causes of PM10 exceedance are wood burning and sea spray.

Responsible management

Scott added that many quarries already had good dust management in place but it was important all operators continued to lift their game. He said any dust that emerged from a quarry – as from any farming or earthmoving operation – was annoying to close neighbours.

'Generally, nuisance dust emissions are managed well in quarries,' Scott said. 'There is always room for improvement and quarry operators need to be vigilant in managing this.'

Roche said as AQA chair, often with Wayne Scott, he was always upfront about the dust issue.

'But the publicity the Yaldhurst residents attracted – dramatic photos of people wearing face masks – are now making any new quarry proposal in Canterbury very hard to progress,' Roche said.

'It's not helping that some politicians are now picking up calls to look at 500m setbacks, sometimes citing Australian experiences. What they neglect to say is that Australia uses the 500m setbacks to protect precious rock resources from urban encroachment, not the other way around,' he added.

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Wayne Scott, MinEx CEO



AQA's retiring part-time CEO Roger Parton with outgoing chair Brian Roche at the recent QuarryNZ conference in Hamilton.

Roche said in the post-quake phase, 'Canterbury needs new quarries' and 'Christchurch alone needs 29ha per year of new ground'.

New leadership

To succeed Roche, two Canterbury-based quarry professionals in Jared Johnston and Mike Higgins were elected the chairman and deputy chairman respectively of AQA at that body's recent AGM in Hamilton.

The new leadership was quick to nominate as one of the industry's priorities lobbying against a proposal by ECan to introduce mandatory full-time dust monitoring at quarries in the Canterbury region.

'We have a range of challenges facing our industry, mostly around where quarries interface with people on urban fringes,' incoming chairman Johnston, who is the South Island quarries manager at Fulton Hogan, said. 'We want [to appoint] a new CEO who can work with government, councils, communities and our members and create a new dialogue and some win/win outcomes.'