

Workers put at risk from dust

An Ashburton company that makes feed pellets for cows was last week fined \$70,000 for failing to protect workers from toxic dust generated during the manufacturing process. The judge also ordered them to pay emotional harm payments of \$13,000 and WorkSafe's court costs of \$4,740.

This is a timely reminder of our obligations to protect the health and wellbeing of workers.

The potential for worker exposure to crystalline silica is widespread within mining and quarrying. Very fine Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS) is particularly harmful to workers. It can be generated during drilling, blasting, crushing, cutting and transporting. Exposure to dust generally while not causing long-term health effects, may cause irritation and symptoms of concern in some people.

We all have a duty to ensure that no worker is exposed to a substance which is hazardous to health in a concentration that exceeds the prescribed exposure standard for that substance.

In order to achieve this sites need to conduct appropriate dust monitoring to identify worker exposure levels and put in place suitable controls to ensure workers are not exposed to levels above the prescribed exposure standards. All workers should have a regular medical which includes spirometry (lung capacity test). For more information see [A guide to Worker Health in Extractives](#) on the MinEx website.

You should consider the following Controls:

- **Use of water on plant, stockpiles and roads to ensure dust generation is limited.**
- **Where appropriate, dry dust extraction is used to limit generation of dust. This may include filters, dust collectors and filtration systems.**
- **Separation for workers from areas of high exposure to fine dust particles including crushing and screening plant while operating, laboratories while sieving, and load-out areas if not protected by an air-conditioned cabin.**
- **Adequate Personal Protective Equipment that is designed for the particular hazardous substance, is comfortable to wear, and is readily available to all workers.**

Let's work together to keep ourselves and our workers safe.

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