



Safety Alert

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union

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REFRACTORY WORK CAN KILL.

The CFMEU has been informed about several members who were refractory workers have tragically died of lung disease.

The dangers of inhaling silica dust are becoming more widely known, and under the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission, workers working in high risk activities such as excavation, earth moving, clay and stone machine operators, paving and surfacing, mining and **construction labouring** activities are required to undergo medical monitoring.

Refractory Workers are included in the above, but they've got more to worry about than just silica dust. Chem Alert (an independent chemical database that provides MSDS reports), rates Silica as having a high chronic health hazard rating. Other products used by refractory workers are rated as extreme.

Furness walls are lined with refractory bricks that contain, among other things, cristobalite Silica, ceramics and other synthetic mineral fibres and chromium in varying forms, depending on the age and condition of the Furness. Exposure to high temperatures causes both silica and chromium to become more hazardous. Hexavalent chromium is a known carcinogen and crystalline silica is rated as group 2A, probably carcinogenic to humans. The rating is currently under review.

Some older furnaces contain asbestos in its various forms.

Heat insulation blankets used in refractory work are also rated as having an extreme chronic health hazard rating. Again, the greater the age the blanket the higher the temperatures involved, the more hazardous they are. They are made from aluminosilicate fibres, which are classified as A2, suspected human carcinogens, and after exposure to high temperatures, cristobalite can form on the surface.

Workers demolishing or maintaining furnaces are at the most risk.

Worksafe Australia and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations require that workers exposed to silica and other hazardous substances have regular medical monitoring. This should include "baseline" monitoring that shows the state of a persons health before they are exposed to the hazardous substance, as well as ongoing medical examinations. **Refer: Regulation 5.23(1) & Schedule 5.3 for type of health monitoring required.**

Report unsafe sites and safety procedures call 9221 1055 Text 0419 812 861