



What you need to know about **engineered stone**

HIA is aware that members and their clients may have concerns about using engineered stone in their current or future project.

HIA sets out some FAQs regarding the use of engineered stone.

Q. What is engineered stone?

Engineered stone, also known as artificial composite stone, reconstituted stone, manufactured stone or agglomerate stone, is a man-made composite material that is made by mixing crushed stone with a resin binder. This material is manufactured in a factory and can be customised to meet the specific needs of a construction project. It is designed to mimic the appearance of natural stone while offering certain advantages.

One of the benefits of engineered stone is that it is extremely durable and resistant to scratches, stains, and heat. It is also non-porous, which makes it easy to clean and maintain.

Engineered stone is most commonly used for bathroom and kitchen surfaces, particularly splash backs, flooring, countertops, and benchtops.

Q. What are the safety concerns with using engineered stone?

Despite its many benefits, engineered stone can pose health risks to workers involved in its production and installation.

Engineered stone materials can contain high levels of respirable crystalline silica, which can be released into the air as dust during the manufacturing process.

Workers who breathe-in this dust are at risk of developing silicosis, a lung disease that can be fatal. Other respiratory diseases can also develop because of exposure to the dust.

Q. What is silicosis?

Silicosis is an incurable disease in which the lungs are scarred following long-term exposure to silica dust (aka respirable crystalline silica or RCS), high percentages of which may be found in some engineered stone products and are released via cutting, drilling and grinding.

Q. Can you get silicosis from your kitchen bench?

No. Once it has been installed, dust is not released.

Q. Is there currently a ban on the use of engineered stone benchtops, panels and slabs?

A ban on the use, supply and manufacture of engineered stone benchtops, panels and slabs will take effect from 1 July 2024.

However, until the ban comes into effect, as per the advice of Safe Work Australia, workers and businesses **can continue to work with engineered stone** in a controlled way in accordance with WHS regulations.

Q. How will the ban impact current and future projects?

While the ban on engineered stone would not take effect immediately, and may be subject to some transitional arrangements you should discuss the impact of the ban on your project with your builder including for example:

- For contracts entered into before 31 December 2023 the timeline for your projects commencement and works schedule and the specification of products for the project with respect to the 1 July 2024 date, noting that some jurisdiction may permit the supply installation or processing of engineered stone benchtops, panels and slabs under these contracts until 31 December 2024.
- For current projects and projects under contracts entered into from January 2024 (i.e. after any transitional period):
 - Alternative products that might be suitable should your chosen engineered stone product become unavailable or your project be subject to the ban.
 - Any time delays that might result from a ban that require the use of an alternative product.
 - Any cost implications that might result from being required to use an alternative product.



Working with engineered stone

Currently, most states and territories have Codes of Practice available to assist builders and tradespeople work safely with engineered stone.

Since 2022 Victoria requires a licensed person to work with engineered stone that contains 40% or more crystalline silica.

All building and construction workers in the ACT are required to complete mandatory silica training.

Q. What should your builder do when working with engineered stone?

To protect themselves and their workers from the health risks associated with the installation of engineered stone, there are several steps builders and related trades could take. These include:

- Following safe work practices to reduce dust. For example, using water when cutting, using on-tool dust extraction, and providing adequate ventilation.
- Ensuring that workers wear protective equipment, including masks and respirators, when working with engineered stone or other materials that contain crystalline silica.
- Cleaning up all residue.

Safe work practices should be adopted even in the case of minor work involving engineered stone, for example, cutting to insert a power point or kitchen cooktop.

Q. Who can remove the engineered stone, for example as part of a bathroom renovation?

Aside from in Victoria, there are no restrictions on who can remove engineered stone. However, appropriate safety measures should be adopted.

There will be specific exemptions included in the new rules that will permit repairs, minor modifications and removal of engineered stone to be undertaken. Further details on this will be provided in coming months.

Q. What are some engineered stone alternatives?

There are a number of alternative benchtop products including traditional options such as:

- concrete
- stainless steel
- porcelain
- natural stone
- timber
- laminate and solid surfaces
- as well as a wide variety of other newer and innovative products are also coming into the market.

It is therefore best to do your research and talk to your builder/kitchen and bathroom companies.

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