



# Stone tiles and decorative stones

## *a guide for importers, suppliers and tilers*

### Background

This guide assists people importing, supplying, handling and laying tiles and decorative stacked stone, loose natural stone or pebbles.

Many builders, tilers and decorators are installing naturally occurring stone products in homes and commercial buildings for both service areas and for decoration.

Most of these materials contain significant amounts of silica and other minerals that could pose serious health risks. Proper safe working procedures and precautions must be adopted when working with these products to reduce health risks.

### Safe working procedures

- use wet cutting methods for all tile cutting, sawing and drilling such as water connected to cutting or grinding tools;
- use particulate respiratory protection (P1 or P2) when cutting or drilling products;
- use local exhaust ventilation (booth, hood or tools fitted with extraction), to remove dust from the breathing zones where wet methods are not available or practical;
- bring the local exhaust ventilation as close as possible to the dust source;
- use a turntable or a bench with wheels so that the operator can rotate the work piece and direct the dust towards the extraction point;
- use non-powered tools to minimise fine dust being generated;
- pre-cut the material at the factory as much as possible to minimise dust during installation work (eg kitchens);
- isolate work areas from the public to reduce potential exposures;
- use industrial vacuum cleaners fitted with HEPA filters or wet methods to clean dusty clothing, floors or surfaces;
- vacuum work clothes before leaving work area or dust off overalls/work clothes by hand next to the extraction system while wearing a respirator;
- launder work clothes at work rather than taking dusty work clothes home. If using a commercial laundry, dampen overalls and place in a labelled plastic bag and inform the laundry that the overalls are contaminated with mineral dust;
- non disposable personal protective equipment (PPE) should be cleaned immediately after use.

**Important:** Do not use dry sweeping or compressed air to clean dusty clothing, floors or surfaces.

If the tiles require shaping and bevelling (eg for large commercial installations) with an angle grinder, conduct work in an extracted enclosure and use particulate respiratory protection at a minimum, P1 or P2 at all times.

Where there is uncertainty about the level of exposure or the effectiveness of controls in cutting, drilling or working stone products, air monitoring may be required to assess the risk. Where that risk is assessed as being significant (ie exposure requires respiratory protection to maintain adequate control) health surveillance should be instituted.

What should importers and suppliers of stone and tile products do?

Naturally occurring stone and tile products may contain asbestos. Because asbestos poses significant risks to health (asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma), it is illegal to import asbestos containing materials into Australia. Importers must take steps to ensure that the products they are importing do not contain asbestos.

Importers or retailers who suspect they may have obtained tile or stone materials which contain any asbestos minerals must immediately stop supplying these products and inform WorkSafe WA.

Suppliers should make the following information available to purchasers and end users:

- what the product contains;
- any potential health hazards associated with working with the products; and
- how workers can handle these products safely.

What do installers or removers of decorative stacked stone or pebbles need to do?

The use of power tools to cut, grind or polish stone products (eg granite, sandstone, decorative stacked stone tiles, reconstituted stone and slate), can generate dust containing a range of mineral particles such as crystalline silica.

Control measures must therefore be implemented to eliminate or minimise exposure of workers and other people to this dust.

## What are the risks?

Inhalation of very fine, respirable mineral particles over a period of time can cause damage to the lungs. For example, long term exposure to respirable crystalline silica particles, created when using power tools to cut or grind stone materials, can cause bronchitis, emphysema, silicosis (scarring of the lungs) and lung cancer. Silicosis can be fatal.

## Pebbles and stones

Users of decorative pebbles and stone containing silica are unlikely to face any specific risk to their health as the pebbles are not normally processed in any way which would lead to the release of silica dust.

## Further information

Further information on silica and asbestos can be found on the WorkSafe website at [www.worksafe.wa.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.wa.gov.au) or call WorkSafe on 1300 307 877.

**National Relay Service: 13 36 77**  
**Quality of service feedback line: 1800 30 40 59**

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### Regional Offices

Goldfields/Esperance	(08) 9026 3250
Great Southern	(08) 9842 8366
Kimberley	(08) 9191 8400
Mid-West	(08) 9964 5644
North-West	(08) 9185 0900
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