

NSW Dust Disease Register Annual Report 2022-23



Table of contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Notifiable Dust Diseases on the Register	4
2.1 Cases and Deaths	4
2.2 Silicosis	4
2.2.1 Cases by type	4
2.2.2 Lung function impairment	4
2.2.3 Demographics of workers	6
2.2.4 Occupational exposure of workers	7
2.3 Asbestosis and Mesothelioma	8
2.3.1 Demographic overview	8
2.3.2 Occupational exposure of workers	8
3. Actions for the Purposes of the Register	9
3.1 Silica	9
3.2 Asbestos	10
4. Appendix	11
4.1 Governance	11
4.2 Information disclosures to other Public Service agencies	11
4.3 Data considerations and quality assurance	11
4.3.1 Privacy	11
4.3.2 Deaths	11
4.3.3 Missing information	12
4.3.4 Quality assurance	12
4.3.5 Updates in future reports	12
4.4 Case notification, recording and reporting requirements	12
4.5 Legacy data	13
4.6 Glossary	14
4.7 Acknowledgments	16

1. Introduction

SafeWork NSW is required by legislation to keep the Dust Disease Register (Register) and to provide a report on the Register at the end of each financial year. This is the third annual report.

The Register records notifications of cases of occupational dust diseases silicosis, asbestosis and mesothelioma in a single place to monitor and analyse the incidence of notifiable occupational dust diseases in NSW.

This report focuses on the notifications from NSW Health of diagnosed cases of silicosis, asbestosis and mesothelioma and death registrations where these diseases are mentioned; reported to the Register during the 2022-23 Financial Year (1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023).

This report has been prepared to meet the requirements of Section 271D of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW), which is for SafeWork NSW to produce a report that includes:

- a. the number of cases of occupational dust diseases notified to SafeWork NSW under section 271B during the financial year,
- b. the number of deaths resulting from occupational dust diseases notified to SafeWork NSW under section 271B during the financial year,
- c. the types of diseases or conditions recorded in the Register during the financial year,
- d. the actions SafeWork NSW has taken to implement the purposes of the Register, and
- e. any other information about a disease or condition recorded in the Register that SafeWork NSW considers appropriate.

2. Notifiable Dust Diseases on the Register

2.1 Cases and Deaths

Table 1. Notifiable dust diseases – types (cases and deaths) (NSW Health notifications)

Type of dust disease	Number of cases*	Number of deaths**
Asbestosis	63	143
Mesothelioma	198	159
Silicosis	65	9
Total	326	311

*A small number of silicosis cases notified to SafeWork NSW are known to have been diagnosed prior to the 2022-23 reporting period. They may also appear in legacy data from previous years. Some silicosis cases were notified to SafeWork NSW after 30 June 2023 but were diagnosed during the 2022-23 period. To align to the requirements of the legislation, these notifications will be captured in the 2023-24 Dust Disease Annual Report.

**Death data may be updated in future reports after formal coding is completed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (see sub-section 4.3.2 Deaths).

2.2 Silicosis

2.2.1 Cases by type

Table 2. Silicosis cases in NSW by type (NSW Health notifications)

Silicosis type	Number of workers
Accelerated	<5
Acute	<5
Chronic	59
Not identified	<5

2.2.2 Lung function impairment

The highest number of reported lung function impairment are workers with 0-5% impairment. In the early stages of silicosis, workers usually do not have symptoms.

Table 3. Workers with silicosis by lung function impairment (%) (NSW Health notifications)

% Lung function impairment	Number of workers
0-5	12
6-40	11
>40	<5
Not identified	38



2.2.3 Demographics of workers

Demographic data (including culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD), age groups and gender) is collected to inform targeted prevention activities including translated resources and targeted awareness campaigns.

- Demographic data has been deidentified to adhere to privacy protocols.
- All cases of silicosis are male.

a) Region of birth

- Australian/New Zealand born workers represented the highest proportion of cases.
- Country of birth data has been grouped under 'region' to allow for more meaningful reporting while maintaining privacy principles, due to the small volumes of data.

Table 4. Workers with silicosis by region of birth (NSW Health notifications)

Region of birth	Number of workers
Australia/New Zealand	21
Asia	11
Europe	5
Middle East	<5
Not identified	26

b) Age group

Table 5. Workers with silicosis by age-group (NSW Health notifications)

Age group	Number of workers
Under 21	0
21-40	18
41-70	37
71-90	7
91+	0
Not identified	<5

2.2.4 Occupational exposure of workers

- The worker's last reported industry/occupation. Due to latency of disease and movement of workers between jobs and industries, the industry/occupation reported may not be where exposure occurred.
- ANZSIC code is determined based on employer information. For some businesses, their ANZSIC codes may not align with a worker's ANZSCO code (for example a business may not be classified as a 'trades' business but may employ tradespeople).
- ANZSIC code 2090 (Other non-metallic mineral product manufacturing - includes manufactured stone represents the highest number of reported cases by industry).
- ANZSCO code 7111 (Clay, concrete, glass and stone processing machine operators) represents the highest number of reported cases by occupation.

Table 6. Workers with silicosis by industry where last exposure is expected to have occurred (ANZSIC code) (NSW Health notifications)

ANZSIC code	Number of workers
2090 – Other non-metallic mineral product manufacturing (including manufactured stone)	47
3109 – Other heavy and civil engineering construction 3212 – Site preparation services earthmoving work	14
Other	<5

Table 7. Workers with silicosis by occupation where last exposure is expected to have occurred (ANZSCO code) (NSW Health notifications)

ANZSCO code	Number of workers
7111 – Clay, concrete, glass and stone processing machine operators	45
7212 – Earthmoving plant operators	5
8219 – Other construction and mining labourers	10
Other	5

2.3 Asbestosis and Mesothelioma

2.3.1 Demographic overview

- 89% of notifications for asbestosis and mesothelioma (combined) were male, and 11% were female.
- 91% of reported deaths for asbestosis and mesothelioma (combined) were male and 9% were female.
- 261 people (89%) diagnosed with mesothelioma and asbestosis combined were over 70 years of age.

2.3.2 Occupational exposure of workers

The main industries where primary exposure to asbestos is likely to have occurred, based on the NSW Health notifications received, for workers diagnosed with asbestosis or mesothelioma are:

- Construction,
- Manufacturing,
- Electrical,
- Painters, and
- Transport workers/truck drivers.

Primary exposure means the industry where the worker is most likely to have contracted asbestosis or mesothelioma. The long latency of these diseases means that people can work across multiple industries over time where they are potentially exposed to asbestos.



3. Actions for the Purposes of the Register

The Register enables SafeWork NSW to investigate harmful workplace exposure to silica and asbestos that has resulted in an occupational dust disease. The investigations that follow these case notifications contribute to a broader strategy of compliance and harm prevention activities.

SafeWork NSW Inspectors review disease notifications to determine an appropriate course of action under WHS legislation. Insights from disease notifications including demographic data about age, gender and country of birth is used to inform targeted prevention and awareness activities. Guidance material is translated into key languages and promoted through cultural groups and awareness campaigns are targeted at key CALD communities.

SafeWork NSW continues to provide education and awareness to businesses and workers who are at risk of exposure to silica and asbestos dusts. Information from the Register will be shared at industry engagement events and through educational materials. SafeWork NSW analyses and updates reporting on information contained in the Register including publishing the NSW Government Silica Dashboard.

As part of its Dust Disease Care Scheme, icare runs a Lung Screening Service which provides health monitoring for workers exposed to hazardous dusts in the workplace. These services are provided at subsidised rates. The service is offered at a clinic in Sydney CBD and through a mobile service that travels to worksites across the state.

3.1 Silica

SafeWork NSW is developing programs of work to deliver on the SafeWork NSW Regulatory Priorities 2023, including: 'Exposure to harmful substances', which aims to reduce the incidence of worker exposure to dangerous substances in the workplace, particularly silica and dangerous chemicals. This is part of the ongoing silica program of work for NSW.

Key components of the program are awareness and education, inspector visits and compliance, legislation, and research into best practice approaches to harm prevention. Details of these are published on the [NSW Government Silica Dashboard](#).

Awareness campaigns continued to run during 2022-23 including industry presentations, webinars, podcasts and the publication of in-language video safety alerts.

Since launching its first silica-focused program in 2018, SafeWork NSW has completed 2699 silica-related workplace visits, resulting in 1532 improvement notices issued, 78 prohibition notices for uncontrolled exposure to silica dust and 6 penalty notices for illegal cutting of engineered stone (as of 30 June 2023).

Employers are required under WHS legislation to provide health monitoring to workers if there is a significant risk to the worker's health because of exposure to crystalline silica. The employer also has a duty to provide a copy of the health monitoring report to SafeWork NSW where a worker may have developed a disease or injury and/or the report contains any recommendations on remedial measures at the workplace. Before the introduction of the Register and fines for failure to notify, this duty was not being followed.

3.2 Asbestos

SafeWork NSW is a member of the NSW Asbestos Coordination Committee to improve asbestos management and awareness across NSW. A key focus for committee members is to align activities with the goals of the National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management 2019-23 (NSP), which aims to eliminate asbestos-related diseases in Australia by preventing exposure to asbestos fibres.

The NSP ensures there is a nationally consistent and coordinated approach to asbestos awareness, management, and removal.

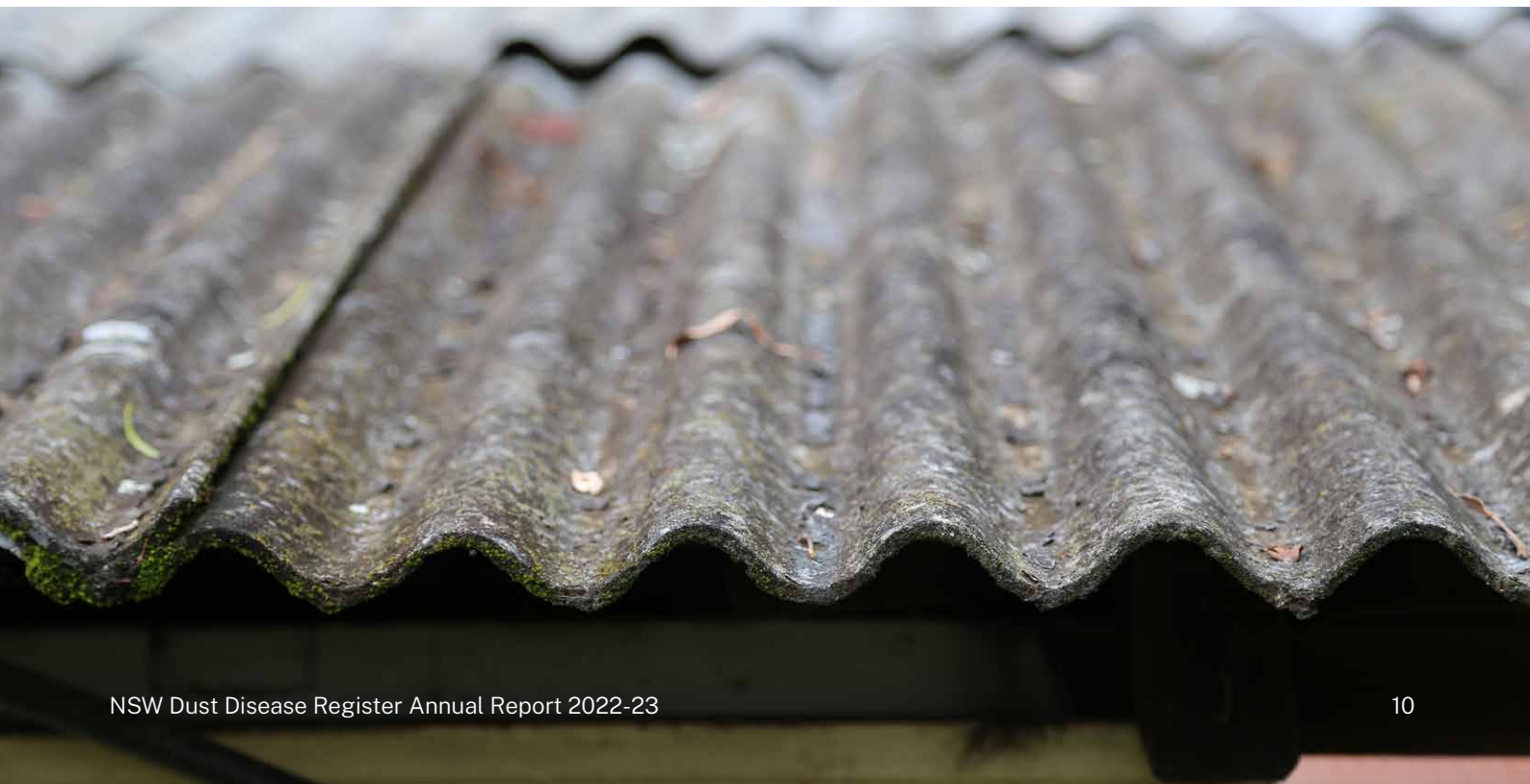
SafeWork NSW chairs the Demolition and Asbestos Consultative Committee which provides a regular forum for industry stakeholders to discuss asbestos health and safety matters.

SafeWork NSW undertakes key activities in direct relation to asbestos including:

- regulation and compliance of asbestos removal/assessor licence holders and registered training organisations delivering asbestos training,
- enforcement activities, which resulted in 457 improvement notices, 100 prohibition notices and 59 penalty notices issued during 2022-23,
- reforms to enable simpler licensing processes and improved customer service, and
- awareness and education activities such as development and promotion of asbestos safety videos, improving knowledge and influencing behaviour around asbestos exposure risks in the workplace and regular asbestos awareness campaigns.

Under WHS legislation, employers must provide health monitoring to workers who are at risk of being exposed to asbestos while on the job, before starting asbestos removal work or ongoing asbestos related work. This includes licensed asbestos removalists and assessors who are wearing full personal protective equipment. Health monitoring should also be provided to workers at regular intervals (at least once every two years) after the worker starts asbestos-related work where there is a risk of exposure to asbestos.

The employer also has a duty to provide a copy of the health monitoring report to SafeWork NSW if the worker has developed a disease or injury and/or the report contains any recommendations on remedial measures at the workplace.



4. Appendix

4.1 Governance

The conditions silicosis, asbestosis and mesothelioma (as it is a cancer) are included as Scheduled Medical Conditions under Part 4 of the *Public Health Act 2010* (NSW), requiring medical practitioners to notify NSW Health when they diagnose a case in NSW.

Part 14 of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW) enables NSW Health to share these notifications with SafeWork NSW for inclusion in the Register and requires SafeWork NSW to securely manage the Register and report to the Minister at the end of each financial year until the Minister is satisfied that a national register has been established to monitor the prevalence of dust diseases and conditions.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) detailing the roles and responsibilities of NSW Health and SafeWork NSW in collecting, transmitting, recording and destroying disease notification data for the Register is in place. The MOU is available on the NSW Government Silica Dashboard webpage.

To enable NSW medical practitioners to notify a silicosis or asbestosis diagnosis, notification forms were developed consistent with other NSW Health forms for notifiable diseases and published on the NSW Health website.

4.2 Information disclosures to other Public Service agencies

Information contained in the notification forms and the Register remains private and confidential.

The Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW) allows for Register data to be referred to relevant regulators.

During the 2022-23 financial year, SafeWork NSW has referred one (1) notification to Comcare and three (3) notifications to the NSW Resources Regulator, the work health and safety regulator for mines and petroleum sites.

4.3 Data considerations and quality assurance

4.3.1 Privacy

To adhere to data privacy principles, where a figure equals less than five (5), the symbol <5 will be shown. Country of birth data has been grouped as 'region of birth' and occupation and industry data has been grouped, to provide more meaningful information due to the low volumes of data which would require the <5 symbol to be used.

4.3.2 Deaths

Death registrations to the NSW Deaths Registrations Unit Record File (DRURF) that mention silicosis, asbestosis and mesothelioma are provided to the Register by NSW Health at the end of each quarter. Information on deaths may be updated in future reports after formal coding is completed at a national level by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for underlying and contributing causes of death. This process can take up to two years and can be further delayed if a death is referred to the coroner. Death data may also be captured if a 'date of death' is listed on a disease notification form.

4.3.3 Missing information

The information contained in the Register relies on the notification forms completed by diagnosing doctors and supplied to SafeWork NSW by NSW Health, death registrations at the DRURF and information contained in the NSW Cancer Registry. During investigations, SafeWork NSW Inspectors may determine additional information that can be updated on the Register. Where information has not been provided in a notification and has not been determined through investigations, it is shown as 'not identified'.

4.3.4 Quality assurance

The development of the disease notification forms followed careful planning and consultation with SafeWork NSW, NSW Health, medical practitioners and other WHS regulators to ensure they capture all the necessary information for the Register. Information entered into the Register is carried out by SafeWork NSW officers and undergoes regular analysis and reporting, including updating of the NSW Government Silica Dashboard.

4.3.5 Updates in future reports

The information contained in this report may be updated in subsequent reports. For example, if additional cases diagnosed during 2022-23 were not notified by 30 June 2023, or if there are changes to death data following final coding for underlying and contributing causes of death.

4.4 Case notification, recording and reporting requirements

Occupational dust disease notification, recording and reporting processes comply with requirements of the *Public Health Act 2010* (NSW), *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW), *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (NSW) and the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW). The procedure for handling dust disease notifications is:

1. The diagnosing doctor completes and submits a notification form available on the NSW Health website to NSW Health to notify of a silicosis or asbestosis diagnosis. Like all cancers, mesothelioma is notified to the NSW Cancer Registry, managed by the Cancer Institute NSW.
2. NSW Health collects and securely transmits these forms to SafeWork NSW on a quarterly basis, along with any new death registrations in the DRURF that mention silicosis, asbestosis or mesothelioma; and NSW mesothelioma case information held by the Cancer Institute NSW.
3. SafeWork NSW receives the information from NSW Health via secure file transfer.
4. SafeWork NSW enters the information into the secure Register and manages records. Where necessary and relevant, SafeWork NSW shares information with other WHS regulators (NSW Resources Regulator and Comcare). SafeWork NSW uses the information in the Register to investigate workplace exposure to silica and asbestos dusts; as well as analyse and report the information contained in the Register.
5. SafeWork NSW provides the Register Annual Report (this report) to the relevant Minister at the end of each financial year and no later than 30 September.
6. The Minister tables the Register Annual Report in Parliament.
7. SafeWork NSW publishes the Annual Report on its website www.safework.nsw.gov.au.

4.5 Legacy data

The following tables display information on dust diseases in NSW from previous years, including before the creation of the Register.

Information in this table for the financial years 2017-20 (1 July –30 June) is sourced from icare NSW and was not collected using the same form and processes currently used for the Register, including cases and deaths not being reported separately. Therefore, direct comparisons with the dust diseases data in the Register cannot be made.

Note that for 2020-21, silicosis data is for the full 12 month reporting period (silicosis became a Scheduled Medical Condition on 1 July 2020) while asbestosis and mesothelioma data is for the final six months of the reporting period (asbestosis became a Scheduled Medical Condition on 18 December 2020).

Year (1 July to 30 June)	Disease type	Cases	Deaths
2021-22	Silicosis	64	10
	Asbestosis	142	111
	Mesothelioma	270	192
2020-21	Silicosis (full 12 months)	57	7
	Asbestosis (final six months)	13	89
	Mesothelioma (final six months)	37	126

Year (1 July to 30 June)	Disease type	Cases
2019-20	Silicosis	107
	Asbestosis	73
	Mesothelioma	174
2018-19	Silicosis	40
	Asbestosis	66
	Mesothelioma	173
2017-18	Silicosis	9
	Asbestosis	47
	Mesothelioma	176

4.6 Glossary

Term	Meaning
ANZSCO	Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, the Australian Bureau of Statistics system for coding and categorising occupations. Where a case's occupation data is known, it has been labelled with the relevant ANZSCO code.
ANZSIC	Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification, the Australian Bureau of Statistics system for coding and categorising industries. Where a case's industry data is known, it has been labelled with the relevant ANZSIC code.
Asbestos	Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals. Asbestos was widely used to create cheap, lightweight, and fire-resistant materials for use in buildings, manufacturing and utilities. Millions of Australian homes contain asbestos. Asbestos is common in NSW homes and buildings constructed or renovated before 1990.
Asbestosis	Asbestosis is a chronic lung disease caused by exposure to asbestos dust. Inhaling asbestos dust can cause scarring in the lungs and in the pleural membrane (lining that surrounds the lungs).
DRURF	The Deaths Registrations Unit Record File (DRURF) includes all deaths registered with the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, including residents of NSW and non-residents. Deaths registration data are timely, however the diagnoses for death registrations data in the DRURF have not been formally coded for underlying and contributing causes of death. This takes place at a national level by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and can take up to two years to occur. Deaths data included in this report may be updated in future reports once this formal coding has been completed and more accurate data is known.
Dust disease	In this report, the term 'dust disease' refers to the three dust diseases that are included in the NSW Dust Disease Register – asbestosis, silicosis and mesothelioma.
Dust Disease Register	The NSW Dust Disease Register is the database where notifications of diagnosed cases of dust disease and deaths are stored. This database is held and managed by SafeWork NSW.
Manufactured Stone industry	Industry that fabricates and installs manufactured stone products (commonly composite quartz benchtops). Manufactured stone products commonly contain a high percentage of silica content and the processes to fabricate and install these products, using high-powered machinery can generate significant silica dust if appropriate safety controls are not in place.
Medical practitioner	All registered medical practitioners in NSW, colloquially referred to as 'doctors'.
Mesothelioma	Mesothelioma is a cancer of the mesothelial cells which cover most internal organs. The only known risk factor for mesothelioma is exposure to asbestos. It can take many years after being exposed to asbestos (between 20 and 60) for mesothelioma to develop.

Term	Meaning
Notification	Information captured in the NSW Health notification form regarding a person's diagnosis of silicosis or asbestosis, a death where a notifiable dust disease is mentioned, or information received by the Register regarding cases of mesothelioma held on the NSW Cancer Registry maintained by Cancer Institute NSW.
Occupational exposure	Exposure of a person to a disease-causing agent (in this case respirable crystalline silica or asbestos) occurring during the person's work.
Silica	The term silica refers to crystalline silica, typically quartz. When materials containing silica are cut, ground, blasted or polished to create dust, this dust can contain fine particles of silica (respirable crystalline silica) that can be breathed deep into the lungs. This fine silica dust is what causes silicosis.
Silicosis	Silicosis is a long-term lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust, usually over a period of many years. The main symptoms of silicosis are shortness of breath, chest pain, cough, and tiredness. However, in the early stages of silicosis there may be no symptoms. The symptoms can become severe as the condition gets worse.
Silicosis – acute	Acute silicosis occurs after a short exposure to very high levels of silica when the alveolar spaces fill with a lipid and proteinaceous exudate. Working with composite stone products (also known as manufactured stone) containing high amounts of crystalline silica also has been linked to cause acute silicosis. Acute silicosis causes rapidly progressive dyspnoea and death, usually within months of onset.
Silicosis – accelerated	Accelerated silicosis occurs within 3 to 10 years of high-level occupational exposure to silica dust. Accelerated silicosis causes severe shortness of breath and may result in complications including respiratory failure and death.
Silicosis – chronic	Chronic silicosis is the most common form of silicosis, where fibrosis occurs more slowly over 10–30 years after first being exposed.

4.7 Acknowledgments

The Register and the delivery of this report is made possible through the cooperation of a number of NSW Government agencies and other associations and organisations, including:

- NSW Health (including the Cancer Institute NSW)
- icare (Insurance and Care NSW)
- NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages
- Department of Customer Service (including SafeWork NSW)
- Thoracic Society Australia New Zealand
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians
- Lung Foundation Australia

