

Re Emergence of Black Lung in Mining Industry and Preventative Measures

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Global Road Technology (GRT) has announced that [black lung disease](#), which started to reappear a few years ago, has now re-emerged as a major problem for both miners and mine operators.

Long term exposure to coal dust can lead to a potentially fatal disease called pneumoconiosis. Pneumoconiosis is one of a group of interstitial lung diseases caused by breathing in certain kinds of dust particles that damage the lungs. It is categorized as an occupational lung disease because these dust are encountered only in workplaces such as the coal industry.

When pneumoconiosis started to appear once again, Andrew Vickers, the national president of one of Australia's biggest unions, the CFMEU, was quoted as saying, "...we are seeing a re-occurrence of the disease, and terribly debilitating disease and a murderous disease that we thought we had eradicated from the industry. It is just not good enough."

The disease is more commonly known as "black lung" because those who have contracted the disease have lungs that look black rather than the normal healthy pink that they should be. There are two forms of black lung disease. The first, simple black lung, sometimes known as coal worker's pneumoconiosis (CWP), has few symptoms and the prognosis is relatively good.

The second form though is not so simple and the prognosis is not so good. CWP can sometimes, unfortunately, progress into progressive massive fibrosis (PMF) also known as complicated black lung. Symptoms exhibited for PMF may include a long-term cough and shortness of breath.

Although doctors may be able to treat the symptoms and complications arising from black lung disease, there is no known cure and the disease is potentially fatal. According to The Lancet, one of the world's oldest and most prestigious peer-reviewed medical journals, coal worker's pneumoconiosis killed 25,000 people in 2013.

The risk of getting black lung depends on how much time has been spent around coal dust and it is for this reason that [dust suppression](#) has become such an important issue within the mining industry. The resurgence of black lung disease among coal miners has been blamed, in part, on changes in mining practices. Factors include longer shifts, an increase in surface mining and the mining of lower-grade coal beds, which, in addition to coal dust, create more silica dust. Silica and coal dust together form a highly potent and toxic mix.

