



Department of Customer Service

Media Release

ORICA FINED \$1.2 MILLION AFTER WORKERS EXPOSED TO COBALT DUST

1 May 2024

Orica Australia Pty Ltd has today been fined \$1.2 million in the District Court of NSW after SafeWork NSW prosecuted the company when two workers were exposed over a number of years to cobalt dust, a known respiratory sensitising agent which can cause occupational illness.

Orica pleaded guilty to a Category 1 offence, the highest category under NSW law, pursuant to section 19 of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* in relation to the exposure between 2014 and 2019 at a Kooragang site which left one worker developing occupational asthma.

A Category 1 offence occurs when a person has a health and safety duty but engages in conduct where an individual is exposed to a risk of death or serious injury or illness and is reckless as to that risk. In this case it was via exposure to cobalt dust through inhalation and skin irritation and direct contact to the eyes, nose, mouth and skin.

Orica's activities at the industrial chemical manufacturing facility at Kooragang Island includes producing cobalt catalyst pellets in the Cobalt Catalyst Manufacturing Shed where the two men worked.

The court found cobalt dust and powders were generated during manufacturing processes and were visible, although the amount of dust and powders generated varied and depended on the stage of the above manufacturing process and the state of the cobalt catalyst.

The chronic effects of exposure to cobalt dust include respiratory effects such as asthma, fibrosis and lung damage, and more rarely cardiac effects and congestion of the liver and kidneys.

For more information on health monitoring for Cobalt Dust, please visit https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-11/health_monitoring_guidance_-_cobalt_1.pdf

Please attribute to Head of SafeWork NSW Trent Curtin.

“The Court found the likelihood of risk of exposure was certain and few steps were taken by Orica to guard against the risk, and those steps were poorly implemented and inadequate.

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“This is a prosecution for a Category 1 offence of the NSW WHS legislation and sends a clear message to industry – if you put people at risk we will prosecute you to the full extent of the laws.”

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