
Asbestos find halts at CITIC Pacific Sino iron ore project

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It is reported that a crisis meeting has stopped work at CITIC Pacific's USD 5.2 billion Sino iron ore project near Karratha after potentially hazardous asbestos was found on site.

Mr Steve McCartney Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union State secretary demanded CITIC stop work at the site until fears over worker asbestos exposure were addressed. Another AMWU spokesman has since confirmed a mass meeting is taking place on site after asbestos was found. The spokesman said he understood 700 to 800 workers had downed tools.

Mr McCartney said that workers digging trenches at the Cape Preston site had found rocks that matched photographs shown to them on safety training courses as being laden with asbestos. He added that information had also been provided to the union that asbestos-ridden dirt may have been used as landfill at the mine, and around the mine's camp area.

Mr McCartney said the union had contacted WorkSafe to have the matter investigated, but had been told no WorkSafe inspector would be available in the Pilbara for the next month. He added that "The minister for mines needs to get WorkSafe to halt work at the mine and order an immediate investigation to ensure the lives of workers are not put at further risk by exposure to deadly asbestos material."

Mr McCartney said that union officials had tried to raise concerns with CITIC but the company had refused to allow unions access to talk to workers and investigate the asbestos concerns.

However, a spokesman for the Sino iron ore project said the AMWU was denied access because it did not meet legislated right of entry requirements. He added that "Most WA iron ore mining operations contend with the issue of fibrous materials and the Sino Iron project takes its responsibility in this area very seriously."

With an expected life of at least 25 years, the Sino project is forecast to mine two billion tonnes of ore and export 27.6 million tonnes of high grade pellets and concentrate each year to steel mills in China. The project employs 1700 staff and contractors on site, in Perth and overseas.

(Sourced from www.country-removals.com.au)

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