

PRESS RELEASE

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AGTA Garners Widespread Industry Support for Silicosis Abatement Project

January 31, 2017 - Tucson, AZ - The American Gem Trade Association announced in June that it had initiated a project to combat the rise of silicosis that has led to health concerns within the colored gemstone industry. After meetings with industry leaders at the AGTA GemFair™ Tucson, President Jeffrey Bilgore announced that the AGTA has received the support of several more groups including the International Colored Gemstone Association (ICA), the Indian Diamond & Colorstone Association (IDCA), the Indian Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) and the Jaipur Jewellers Association.

President Jeffrey Bilgore appointed an ad hoc committee, headed by AGTA Vice President Bruce Bridges, to do a six-month long study to evaluate how the AGTA could address the problem most effectively. "We have contributed significant funding to launch the program," said Bridges, "and have entered into cooperation with a non-governmental organization Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB), and we are moving forward with the acquisition of equipment, production of educational materials and have selected several cutting facilities to institute the test program."

Silicosis is a debilitating and potentially fatal disease that results when workers inhale airborne silica dust released during the fashioning of gem materials containing silica. "Workplace silicosis is not unique to the jewelry industry", says AGTA CEO Douglas K. Hucker. "It is prevalent in hard rock mining, fracking, and particularly pernicious within the construction industries. In our industry it has been a growing problem in gemstone cutting centers, particularly in countries where there is a lack of reliable power and availability of technology that is effective in reducing workers exposure to airborne silica." Bilgore stated, "One of our hopes is that once proving this system works, It can be used or adapted in other areas. This way the jewelry industry can help improve working conditions both within and beyond our sphere."

"We were very greatly encouraged to receive the support of our Board of Directors to begin to tackle this problem" states Bilgore, "but we also knew that the tacit support of our colleagues in the industry like the ICA, the GJPC and the Jaipur Jewellers Association would be crucial in providing assistance on the ground in India to make this project a success. To now be able to announce industry-wide support for this project is gratifying and can only improve our chances of making significant improvements."

Along with the funding of equipment, AGTA is also working with WHWB who have experience in this arena to develop and refine educational materials such as pictograph brochures and native language videos that can be distributed to support the use and necessity of the abatement equipment. Any individuals or groups who would like to inquire about providing support for this effort should contact Douglas Hucker, AGTA CEO, at 800-972-1162 or at info@agta.org.

The American Gem Trade Association is a not-for-profit Association serving the natural colored gemstone and cultured pearl industry since 1981. The AGTA serves the industry as "The Authority in Color" and has it's headquarter office in Dallas, Texas.

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