



Low risk of lung damage: Thompson



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GALAXY Resources has dampened concerns Esperance residents could be exposed to lung damage from the export of spodumene, containing traces of mica particles, from the port.

Lung Institute of WA director Philip Thompson said mica dust could cause damage to the lungs and "lead to chronic lung scarring".

But he said the risk to Esperance residents "must be relatively low".

"The disease process is relatively rare and often other dusts are mixed in," Dr Thompson said. "The total number of historical cases worldwide is in the hundreds, the finer the particles, the greater the risk."

A spokesman for Galaxy said mica, like spodumene, was inert, non-toxic and naturally occurring.

"The material will be kept damp so there is limited dust," the spokesperson said.

"And as is the case with all exports, there will be independent monitoring by the Department of Environment and Conservation in place."

Dr Thompson said exposure to the dust needed to occur over many years.

"The disease process is relatively slow and insidious," he said.

"Although symptoms may appear after 10 years, patients often do not present for medical attention for up to 35 years later."

The first shipment of spodumene is scheduled for the first quarter of this

year.

A DEC spokesperson said moisture was an effective means of minimising dust generation.

"However if the material is allowed to dry out, then dust may be generated," she said. "Mica is a highly visible, reflective material."

"Environmental effects would depend on the particle size, concentration in the air and duration."

She said Esperance Ports Sea and Land would be responsible for complying with its DEC licence conditions in the handling, storage and export of spodumene.

"A DEC officer will attend the first receipt of spodumene at the port and also the first shiploading of this material to ensure licence compliance," she said.

A Galaxy statement said a comprehensive wet screening process would be used to eliminate any dust particles from the spodumene.

"Galaxy's product will be coarse and dust-free, eliminating the potential for irritation or discomfort that sometimes arises from direct or chronic exposure to dust from more finely ground spodumene," it said.

"The wet screening process will be undertaken at the mine site under controlled conditions and the dust-free product transported to port for export."