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245-T man still seeking justice

DANIEL EMERSON

A former government agricultural worker exposed to the toxic chemical 245-T while spraying weeds in the 1970s says he has been offered an ex gratia payment by the State but still feels betrayed.

Carl Drysdale, one of hundreds of Agricultural Protection Board workers involved in the spraying program in Derby, said it was scandalous it had taken 25 years to be offered formal recognition.

Mr Drysdale, 64, said he was asked by Department of Premier and Cabinet director-general Peter Conran whether he would accept an ex gratia payment, but no timeframe or amount had been set.

He also said he was upset the Government appeared to be handling

the matter as a one-off payment to him rather giving workers' compensation to all survivors of the program.

Mr Drysdale, of Pinjarra, said he had been told by a former colleague recently that of about 400 men who used the agent orange component 245-T, only six to 12 were still alive.

The Insurance Commission of WA has previously paid compensation to former workers but only those who got cancer.

Mr Drysdale said he had numerous ailments, except cancer.

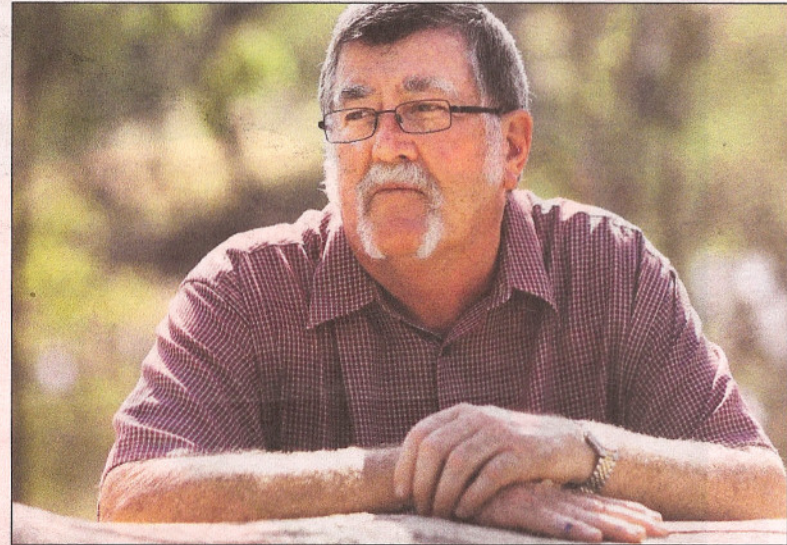
"Internal bleeding, constant headaches, rashes, blisters, I had a heart attack at 36 and have had at least 60 lots of pneumonia and bronchitis," he said. "This has not been handled with decency. Successive governments have just run away from this."

Occupational physician Andrew

Harper, who did a government review of the workers' conditions in 2001 which found a link between the exposure and health problems, said he recommended at the time that workers' compensation be considered. A second report by an Eastern States bureaucrat contradicted his findings.

"My assessment was that there was a proportion who had been APB employees or associated with APB employees whose current health problems were attributable to the chemical exposures," Dr Harper said.

"It was a work-related problem." Premier Colin Barnett would not confirm the offer of an ex gratia payment to Mr Drysdale. "The State Government has been working with Mr Drysdale over the past 18 months to come to some resolution with regard to his situation," he said.



Upset: Carl Drysdale says he has numerous ailments.

Picture: Astrid Volzke