



Office of Hon Pete Hodgson

MP for Dunedin North

Minister of Transport
Minister of Commerce
Minister for Land Information
Minister of Statistics

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Associate Minister of Health
Associate Minister for Industry
and Regional Development
Convenor, Ministerial Group on Climate Change

Government action to date in respect of Pentachlorophenol, a summary

Pentachlorophenol, an organochlorine, was used as an antiseptant treatment on freshly sawn timber from the 1950's to 1988. Summarised below are the measures government has taken to address issues arising from the impact of pentachlorophenol on SWAP members.

ACC related matters

- ACC has worked proactively to assist SWAP to lodge their claims for ACC cover. ACC has explained the claim process to SWAP, assisted with claim lodgement by working with SWAP at the local ACC branch, and provided staff to travel to Whakatane to assist the SWAP claimants and give them individual attention in regard to lodging their claims.
- ACC has now considered claims from the SWAP group. ACC has covered some conditions in 34 of the 46 claims. ACC cover was for specified conditions and not for all health conditions that an individual may have presented with.
- In coming to decisions on the claims received from former timber workers, ACC has not used the Test of Poisoning, and has informed SWAP of this.
- ACC has received 46 claims from former timber workers:
 - 22 have been accepted for some acute effects
 - 12 have been accepted for some acute and some chronic effects
 - 12 have been declined
- Currently there are 45 claimants who are exercising their right to review the decisions. DRSL (Dispute Resolution Service Ltd) has set down hearing times in March and April for the reviews lodged.
- The matters raised by SWAP will be covered in detail at the review hearings and it would be inappropriate to pre-empt that forum.

Environmental matters

Remediation of contaminated CHH Board Mill site in Whakatane

- SWAP sent a letter to Ministers on January 28th 2005 asking for an independent risk assessment of the Carter Holt Harvey owned site

- The Ministry for the Environment commissioned a study that estimated the extent of dioxin contamination at a number of sawmill sites, including the Carter Holt Harvey owned site, persisting from the historical use of PCP
- Environment Bay of Plenty and Whakatane District Council have also agreed to commission a review of Carter Holt Harvey owned site reports.
- The Department of Labour is monitoring the remediation process at the contaminated site to ensure that workers and the public were not exposed to any contaminated dust that may have resulted from the remediation work. The Department is satisfied with the safety procedures that were adopted for the soil remediation work undertaken at the Whakatane site.
- The Department of Labour has also overseen the safe removal and storage of soil from the site in response to the Whakatane floods in July 2004, and the safe removal of asbestos identified on the site next to the sawmill in November 2004.
- The results will contribute to the Stockholm Convention National Implementation Planning and to the National Environmental Standard for contaminated land
- SWAP, Whakatane District Council, Bay of Plenty District Health Board's public health service and Environment Bay of Plenty continue to meet to attempt to resolve issues associated with the remediation of the site.

Dioxin Soil Criteria

- Current soil acceptance criteria for dioxins for agricultural, residential and industrial land use settings are in the *MfE/MoH Health and Environmental Guidelines for Selected Timber Treatment Chemicals (1997)*
- In 2002 the Ministry of Health adopted a new dioxin exposure value of 30pg/g TEQ/kg bw/month
- The Ministry for the Environment is developing National Environmental Standards for contaminated land – this will take 12-18 months and replace current guidelines.

Properties with wood waste contamination – 6 Kingi Place

- Housing New Zealand Corporation property alleged to have contaminated wood waste had been spread on the garden
- Current tenants have health issues they attribute to dioxin
- Soil analysis showed the property was unlikely to have ever received PCP contaminated wood waste; the congener profile was consistent with urban soils
- Levels of dioxin contamination found on the site were lower than the most conservative New Zealand and international guideline values for the protection of human health; therefore no remediation or clean-up of the property from the presence of trace levels of dioxin in the soil was necessary to protect human health
- SWAP has since asked Environmental Bay of Plenty (EBOP) to test dust samples from the inside of the house for dioxin; EBOP requested the Medical Officer of Health to facilitate this; Ministry of Health will not agree as the independent review concluded there was no evidence of contamination from

PCP treated wood waste, and the cost is excessive (the soil study cost \$30,000).

Health matters

Health clinic

- In March 2004, former Associate Minister of Health, the Hon Damien O'Connor, agreed to progress SWAP's proposal for a dedicated free clinic for its members and their families
- SWAP identified two main barriers to adequate treatment: cost and a lack of recognition by general practitioners of chemical exposure; also lack of access to a neurologist and dermatologist

Dedicated clinic:

- Ongoing negotiation between SWAP (assisted by the Medical Officer of Health for the Bay of Plenty), the Primary Health Organisation (PHO) manager for the Bay of Plenty DHB and the Eastern PHO to provide a dedicated clinic
- Proposals developed to date have not been successful but the Bay of Plenty Medical Officer of Health has continued to work on this issue and has advised (early March 2005) that he, together with SWAP, are now developing a list of options to present to the PHO. This will include upskilling the health professionals in each of the general practices in the Whakatane District on the health issues associated with exposure to timber treatment chemicals, on options for removing all costs associated with visits to the doctor for SWAP members, and for conducting research on the health of SWAP members. SWAP intends presenting this paper to the PHO during March.

Cost of primary health care

- Eastern Bay of Plenty PHO is funded through the Access Formula, available to PHOs serving populations of deprivation decile 9 or 10 and people with high health needs
- Fees are \$15 for a normal adult consultation and \$3 for each prescription item

Chemical exposure recognition

- The Medical Officer of Health has been working with the Eastern PHO to offer an evening upskilling session for local GPs on the health effects of various chemicals that SWAP members and their families were exposed to

Access to specialists

- Currently Whakatane Hospital has a neurologist and dermatologist, both with a two-week waiting list; there is no charge for seeing a specialist at any public hospital or for any tests carried out by these hospitals on GP referral.

Research

- The Bay of Plenty District Health Board and the Ministry of Health have analysed hospital admission data, mortality data and cancer data to investigate the health of residents of the Whakatane District.
- Research is ongoing with the Department of Labour has funded a research project to assess the health outcomes of former timber workers exposed to pentachlorophenol (PCP). This research is being conducted by the Centre for Public Research at Massey University, and is administered by the Health Research Council of New Zealand.
- Gwenda Paul represents SWAP on the Advisory Committee of the PCP research project, which last met on 12 July 2004. Fieldwork is underway, and the Department of Labour understands that the research team keeps in contact with SWAP on progress made.
- The research project runs from 1 July 2004 to 1 January 2007. Initial results may be available by mid-2006.

Government policy

New Zealand has ratified the Stockholm Convention on the Elimination of Persistent Organic Pollutants, which came into force on 17 May 2004. A national implementation plan is being prepared of measures to further reduce dioxin production, to collect and dispose of persistent organic pollutants, to phase out PCBs, and to manage contaminated sites.

10 March 2005