

Transcription | Diseases Caused By Dioxin 13 Jun 2008 Radio New Zealand Morning Report

Ref: **RNZ-13JUN2008-Diseases-Caused-by-Dioxin**

Introduction

New Zealand needs to take another look at diseases caused by dioxins, well at least that's the call from a world leading expert on the toxic chemicals who says the Ministry of Health's view on dioxin linked illness is too narrow. The Ministry says its position is sound and its focussing on providing health assistance to those who need it. Taranaki reporter Craig Ashworth came up with this story.

Craig Ashworth

Concerns about dioxin poisonings in New Zealand have focussed on Vietnam War Veteran's and workers and neighbours of the former Ivon Watkins Dow Agrichemical Plant in New Plymouth. Successive governments have maintained that dioxin causes a small number of illnesses on the advice of the Institute of Medicine or IOM of the United States National Academies. The IOM says there is proof that dioxin causes four rare cancers and chloracne. It says there's limited or suggestive evidence of a link with several other conditions including hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, respiratory and prostate cancer and others. But one of the world's top experts on dioxin and health, Professor Arnold Schecter of the University of Texas, says dioxins can cause many more illnesses.

Professor Schecter

Cancer, birth defects, brain damage, reproductive problems, developmental effects, disruption of the endocrine system, thyroid and diabetes especially, they can decrease the resistance to infection by damaging the immune system, cause skin reactions, liver damage and in extremely high amounts death from heart attacks.

Craig Ashworth

In 26 years of research Arnold Schecter has written more than 300 peer reviewed articles well over 100 of them on dioxins and he co-edited the standard reference text "Dioxins and Health". Professor Schecter says the IOM was contracted by US politicians looking for advice on compensation for Vietnam Veteran's, a very narrow approach that isn't reliable as a benchmark of dioxin harm.

Professor Schecter

The Institute of Medicine accepted a contract whereby Congress told them what they were allowed to look for and say. They were not allowed to go beyond the words that Congress used. It is an extremely cautious approach and probably underestimates the potential health effects of dioxins on humans.

Craig Ashworth

Professor Schecter says alternative advice could come from the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the US Environmental Protection Agencies draft dioxin reassessment, the US Centre for Disease Control and the published scientific literature. He also says officials should convene an International Advisory Panel of independent scientists. The Health Ministry's Deputy Director of Public Health, Dr Fran McGrath says there are no plans for any of that.

Dr Fran McGrath

The Institute of Medicine is a reputable group. It is seen as the experts in this field. They do a thorough review of the evidence on a two yearly basis and that is going to be extremely useful for continuing to monitor whether there is any development in terms of evidence about exposure and health impacts.

Craig Ashworth

Dr McGrath says that the government is now focussed on the health support service for former workers and neighbours of the chemical plant in Paritutu. The core of the service is free annual health checks with patients referred on to specialists if needed. Eligibility for that service isn't dependent on proving a link between dioxin and any particular illnesses instead anyone who was in Paritutu for long enough while Ivon Watkins Dow made contaminated herbicide is covered. A Paritutu dioxin campaigner Andrew Gibbs says many residents welcomed that but would still like acknowledgement that dioxins can cause deaths and diseases the Health Ministry doesn't recognise.

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Andrew Gibbs

You are seeing an array of problems. A lot of the families exhibiting immune type problems over multiple generations, fertility, reproductive, particularly in the females that grew up here and you know also neurobehavioural. I think the key thing is they have to really assess that data thoroughly independently and find out how serious these exposures were before you put the health service in place.

Craig Ashworth

The Health Ministry will begin free health checks for those who lived and worked in the Paritutu dioxin exposure zone from July 1st.

In New Plymouth for morning report, Craig Ashworth