

## Dumping inquiry not needed: Dow

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New Plymouth chemical company Dow AgroSciences says it would cooperate with any public inquiry the Government ordered into allegations of chemical dumping in the 1960s.

But operations manager Jim Guidarini says there is no need for another inquiry as the issues are already out in the public arena.

Green MP Sue Kedgley has written to Attorney-General Margaret Wilson asking for an urgent independent public inquiry into allegations that the chemical company dumped cancer-causing chemicals in New Plymouth in the 1960s.

The company, then called Ivon Watkins Dow, made the herbicide 2,4,5-T at its Paritutu plant from the early 1960s until 1987.

The herbicide contained dioxin, which can cause cancer and has been linked to reproductive failure and birth defects.

Ms Kedgley said allegations that chemicals used to make Agent Orange were dumped in places around the city have circulated for decades, but new information claimed the amount dumped was significant.

She said an article this month in the magazine Investigate claiming to have uncovered new evidence had raised the stakes and made an inquiry urgent.

"The allegations are very serious and, if proven, could have a huge impact on the health of residents."

The magazine claimed that a former company board member, now in his 80s, had presented proof that dumping took place. Investigate will not name the man.

Ms Kedgley wrote to Health Minister Annette King in September asking for the alleged dump sites to be dug up and the soil analysed, but was told it was a "low priority."

A King spokeswoman said the Government was closely monitoring the situation and trying to find the best way to deal with it.

Ms Kedgley said anecdotal evidence pointed to clusters of illnesses "well above average" in the city that needed to be explained, such as 14 cases of multiple sclerosis in one street.

The Government should identify the whistleblower, by issuing a court order if necessary, and interview him to test the truthfulness of his claims, she said.

Mr Guidarini said that if the Government believed another inquiry was needed, "we would cooperate."

A number of health inquiries had been carried out, mostly recently in the late 1980s. There were no health issues of concern, he said.

Mr Guidarini said it was a matter of public record that some chemicals were buried on company land in the 1960s in accordance with the regulations of the time.

That site was later cleaned up.

The Taranaki Regional Council had recently investigated alleged dump sites and found that none was contaminated.

- NZPA