

## Environment Ministry denies secrecy on dioxin

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By ANNE BESTON

The Ministry for the Environment says a report it prepared revealing that New Zealanders have "unacceptable levels" of exposure to the deadly chemical dioxin is not secret - but it refuses to release the document.

The ministry was responding to yesterday's Herald story which outlined the findings of the report.

Environment Minister Marian Hobbs has presented it to a cabinet committee.

A confidential ministry paper, obtained by the Herald, said the report's release would need to be "carefully managed ... to avoid any public alarm."

Yesterday, senior policy analyst Dr Simon Buckland said dioxin levels in New Zealand were "generally low compared with the levels recorded in many other countries." Some of the information in the report was available on the ministry's website.

The report said dioxin, a deadly chemical which is produced through a number of industrial processes including paper bleaching, timber treatment and waste incineration, could cause up to 50 cancer deaths each year.

Dioxin is usually ingested through diet because it accumulates in foods such as dairy products and fish. Women usually have higher levels because the chemical accumulates in body fat.

It interferes with the natural function of the body's cells and can damage the immune and reproductive systems.

It has been linked to cancers.

A spokesman for the ministry said the report's release would not be brought forward.

He said it would probably be made public next month.

[The dioxin report - full text](#)

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