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Greens welcome comprehensive dioxin testing



Sue Kedgley MP

03 Apr 2003

Subject: **Health**

Green MP Sue Kedgley today welcomed the decision by the Ministry of Health to conduct tests of dioxin levels in residents who may have been exposed to chemical emissions from an Ivan Watkins Dow plant.

The Green Party Health spokesperson said she is relieved the blood serum study will target the appropriate group of people, namely residents who lived near the Paritutu plant from the 1960s to the 1980s.

"It is crucial that the tests are conducted on the people who were most likely to have been exposed to dioxin through the 1960's, 70's and 80's," said Ms Kedgley.

"Without including these people the study would have been a complete waste of taxpayer resources. It is particularly important that the study includes people who lived in the area in the mid to late 1960's, when the peak emissions of dioxin were likely to have occurred.

"It is also essential that the Ministry is proactive in seeking out appropriate people who lived near the plant in the 1960's and 70's, using records such as electoral rolls and school rolls as well as by

using newspaper advertising to identify them.

Until 1977, emissions from the Ivan Watkins Dow plant that produced 2,4,5-T at Paritutu were uncontrolled. The product was used both in New Zealand and exported to the United States for inclusion in Agent Orange. Agent Orange was used as a defoliant in Vietnam and has been shown to contain high levels of dioxin.

The Associate Minister Damien O'Connor has assured Ms. Kedgley that measurements of dioxin levels in the blood will be checked against measurements the level in body fat, since there is some concern that the blood testing method does not give a good measure of actual dioxin level in the body.

However, Ms. Kedgley is still concerned that a suitable control group can be found.

"In New Zealand, people generally have relatively high levels of dioxin in their bodies, probably due to the historical exposure to dioxin in the food chain and through employment.

"Up until 1990, when 2,4,5-T was deregistered, it was a commonly used agricultural chemical in New Zealand, and because it accumulates in fats was likely to have been consumed through milk and other animal products. This issue needs to be addressed before the study is conducted."

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