



## ENVIRONMENT

# Marfell toxic tip site gets all-clear

By KIRSTY JOHNSTON - Taranaki Daily News    Last updated 05:00 27/08/2009

Independent experts who cleared Marfell Park for dioxins have also warned the district council against repeating its mistake elsewhere.

Contaminated sites specialist Graeme Proffitt yesterday released his report on the park a former city tip and said there was no need for residents to worry about any contaminants or environmental risk.

Two drums containing toxic residue from herbicides manufactured at the Ivon Watkins-Dow factory were uncovered when council contractors dug a stormwater drain across the park last May.

Dr Proffitt has advised the New Plymouth District Council to change the way it manages its parks to ensure a similar incident cannot happen again.

"It is unfortunate on the council's part that they just happened to hit it you wouldn't normally expect to find those particular residues there," he said.

"We have suggested the council should have a management plan to control excavation works."

He recommended excavation into the waste was avoided or carefully managed, as risk from contaminated sites only happened when there was exposure. "If the waste is under a cap it is safe," he said.

New Plymouth District Council manager of community assets Anthony Wilson said Dr Proffitt's recommendation would be taken up.

The council had not intended to dig through the landfill due to incomplete historic records it thought the waste was only buried further up the valley, Mr Wilson said.

The Marfell Park report was commissioned by the Taranaki Regional Council after the drum discovery caused widespread anxiety in the Marfell community.

Dr Proffitt and his staff tested 85 locations across the park for 300 different substances including dioxin, pesticides, herbicides and heavy metals and found all levels were well below guidelines.

The only other recommendation the scientist made was to have additional soil cover over the area where the agrichemicals were found, which the council had already done.

Marfell residents and affected parties had a meeting with the TRC and Dr Proffitt last night to ask any remaining questions they had about the park.

Community spokesman Mark Smith said while the report had contained some good news, many members of the Marfell community remained sceptical about the park's safety.

Despite the park being given the all clear, he said he would "definitely not" be letting his children play there.

"We're not really happy. We've been here before, in 2001, when they told us there were no toxic chemicals in our park," he said.

"I guess that's the main reason we're still sceptical. But they've put a lot of time and resources and money into this testing regime and we have to take heed of it, I suppose."

Mr Smith said how the park was used and the management of any possible future health risks would be key concerns for residents in the future.

Dioxin campaigner Andrew Gibbs said he was pleased the park had been cleared of risk but asked why, if the soil cap had been too thin, the park had not been fenced off when the chemicals were found.

"It's great to have reassurance, but they're still ignoring the people who were exposed 40 years ago," he said.