

DOW POISONS IN ROCKPOOL

By Rochelle Warrander

14 June 2001 - Traces of chemicals 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D have been found in a pool of discoloured and smelly sea water at the foot of cliffs bordering Dow Agrosience's Waireka research station.

The discovery will add fuel to the debate over whether the herbicides manufactured at Dow's New Plymouth Paritutu plant caused health problems among residents.

But the Taranaki Regional Council yesterday played down the discovery, made by a member of the public walking along the beach in late April.

The pool water was green and had an odour that could be smelled 10m away. Results of tests on the water were released yesterday.

TRC technical services manager Gary Bedford said the council had always known traces of the chemicals were occasionally leaking from the cliff.

Mr Bedford said the levels of chemicals detected in the pool ranged from 2.2 parts per billion (ppb) to 4.4ppb. As well as 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D the water contained the herbicides MCPA and Picloram.

"All four are within the New Zealand drinking water standards," Mr Bedford said.

TRC resource management director Bill Bayfield told the council's consents and regulatory committee yesterday that the chemicals found were at levels "of no environmental consequence" and did not breach Dow's consent conditions.

But committee member Neil Walker was concerned at the find and wanted answers. "It seems to me to be a bit strange. You have a pool with a number of chemicals in it. How it got there is a concern. I want to know how this came about," Mr Walker said.

Mr Bayfield said the leachate, believed to be from the old Waireka chemical dump site, had been a problem since the dump was first found to be leaking chemicals in the early 1980s.

After that discovery, a new, supposedly secure site was developed about 300m away, and further away from the cliff.

"There has always been an odour there and sometimes it has been very strong. It has tailed off though," he said.

Since 1984 there had been a system at the site which took any leachate from the cliff to the secure dump site. Three years ago that leachate system was removed after the amount of contamination went down to non-significant levels, he said.

"But we have never stopped checking. We go there three times a year to check the foreshore for that purpose and we will do that for the foreseeable future.

"Why it chose to give out an odour on this particular day, I don't know," Mr Bayfield said.

"We anticipate that for the next decade or so we will probably have low levels of leachate there."

Dow Agrosiences operations leader Jim Guidarini said the chemical find was not a concern to the company. He presumed the chemicals were residue from the old Waireka dump site.

"We sample there regularly as part of our consent and, as you have heard from the TRC, it is consistent with past sampling. If the levels are not significant, why is that an issue at all?"

When combined, certain components of 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T make Agent Orange, a defoliant used by the United States during the Vietnam War.

Meanwhile, the results of soil tests at suspected New Plymouth dioxin dump sites could take longer than first thought.

Mr Bayfield said the council had completed dioxin tests on more than half the 31 suspected dump sites, but had been advised that results from AgriQuality might not be available until towards the end of the year.

From: Steve Tvedten (steve@getipm.com)

Date: Thu, 14 Jun 2001 08:46:26 -0400