



Report 05.115
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Committee Rural Services and Wairarapa
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Unwanted Agricultural Chemicals

1. Purpose

To provide the Committee with an update on the situation regarding the collection and disposal of unwanted agricultural chemicals in the Region.

2. Context

At the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee meeting on 9 November 2004, concerns were expressed about the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and Federated Farmers advising farmers to contact their regional council to arrange for the disposal of unwanted agricultural chemicals.

This advice has resulted in a large number of farmers contacting Greater Wellington's Wairarapa office with the expectation that Greater Wellington would arrange for disposal of unwanted chemicals.

A significant quantity of unwanted agricultural chemicals have been accumulated by Wairarapa Division staff since the end of Greater Wellington's free chemical collection in June 2003. This was recently disposed of at a cost of around \$3,000, with the costs of overseas disposal yet to come. Additionally, over 30 farmers have been registered as holding chemicals on their properties which require disposal.

3. Background

Between 2001 and 2003 Greater Wellington undertook a substantial unwanted agricultural chemical collection project throughout the Region. At that time all owners of rural properties were contacted by mail offering them the opportunity to get rid of any stockpiles of chemicals.

A total of 460 property owners responded, a response rate of about 7.5% and a total of 22.3 tonnes of chemicals was removed from these properties. The average quantity of chemical removed per property was 48.53 kg.

The chemicals collected ranged from substances such as 2,4,5-T and DDT, which are now prohibited or restricted from being used, to surplus quantities of pesticides and herbicides, such as Round Up or Tordon, which can still be used.

Of the total quantity of chemicals collected, 11.6 tonnes (52%) needed to be exported to be disposed of in an environmentally appropriate manner. A further 6.8 tonnes (31%) were able to be disposed of within New Zealand. The remaining 3.8 tonnes (17%) were able to be re-issued for re-use.

Total expenditure over the two years that this project ran was \$297,891. This represented a collection and disposal cost of \$13.34 per kg.

In September 2004 the New Zealand Government ratified the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. This came into force in New Zealand on 23 December 2004. Persistent Organic Pollutants include pesticides like aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin and polychlorinated bipheyls (PCBs). These are chemical substances which persist in the environment, bio-accumulate through the food chain and pose a risk of causing adverse effects to human health and the environment.

In response to signing the Stockholm Convention, and as a means for encouraging the collection of these substances, MfE has made money available to support regional councils in collecting and disposing of unwanted agrichemicals.

There is an expectation from MfE that regional councils will take up this offer and this was the context for the advice to farmers to contact their regional council to arrange for chemical collection and disposal.

Unfortunately our chemical collection project was completed just prior to MfE making funds available to support this type of activity.

4. Follow up

Since this issue was raised at the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee we have had discussions with MfE staff. MfE have acknowledged that the message being sent to the farming community advising them that regional councils would collect unwanted chemicals was not entirely accurate. They advised that MfE, the Environmental Risk Management Authority and Federated Farmers were preparing a joint media release which would clarify the general requirements for the Stockholm Convention. A key issue for clarification was that farmers could store unwanted chemicals on their properties without breaching the terms of the Convention.

We asked MfE if there were funds available to pay for the disposal of chemicals which we had received as a consequence of the advice given to farmers, but were told that funding was only available for comprehensive region wide programmes. Furthermore, the budget for the current year was already committed.

5. Discussion

It appears that GW's one-off collection, whilst successful, was not enough to remove all unwanted chemicals from the environment. There also appears to be on-going demand for the disposal of unwanted rural chemicals.

Thought needs to be given to how to deal most effectively with the quantities of banned and prohibited chemicals remaining in the Region. A fundamental question which needs to be answered is what on-going commitment does the Council wish to make to this issue. Undertaking this type of activity is not strictly a responsibility of the Council. Legally the liability for disposing of these chemicals lies with the people holding them. The original collection was undertaken because it was considered to provide an overall benefit to the community – and the environment – by ensuring that waste chemicals were disposed of in an appropriate manner. At that time the Council made it quite clear that this was to be a one-off exercise.

If the Council elects to continue to be involved in the collection and disposal of chemicals it appears to have two major options. The first is to repeat the region wide project undertaken over 2001-2003. The alternative approach is to implement a system where we maintain a register of people holding unwanted chemicals and arrange an annual collection from the registered properties. This is an approach currently used by several other regional councils and recommended by GW staff if a decision is made to be involved in this activity.

It is uncertain whether rural property owners would be willing to pay for the disposal of chemicals which they hold.

6. Conclusion

Despite Greater Wellington having provided a region wide agrichemical collection project between 2001 and 2003, it is apparent that there are still quantities of unwanted agricultural chemicals in the Region. This being the case, and given that funding from MfE may be available to support such a project, there may be benefits in repeating this exercise in the near future.

There is no provision to undertake a project of this nature in the current budget. However, this is an issue which could be considered when we develop work programmes and budgets as part of the 2006 LTCCP.

7. Communication

No further public communication is necessary for this report.

8. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee

- 1. receive the report;*
- 2. note its contents; and*
- 3. note that staff will be raising this issue as part of the 2006 LTCCP process.*

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