

Report 99.187

24 October 2000

File: ENV/4/1/1

[Report 1999-187.JMS:ajw]

Report to the Environment Committee
from John Sherriff, Manager, Resource Investigations

Hazardous Waste Management: Update

1. Purpose

To provide the Committee with an update on developments in hazardous waste management, both nationally and within the Wellington Region.

2. Background

At the last Environment Committee meeting the Chairperson requested a report updating the current state of hazardous waste management in New Zealand and the progress made to date by the Regional Waste Liaison Group.

3. Ministry for the Environment

In September 1997 the Minister for the Environment announced funding for a three year programme to improve the management of hazardous waste in New Zealand. The main drivers for this initiative were the realisation that:

- there was a lack of data available about hazardous waste generation and disposal;
- hazardous wastes were managed in an inconsistent manner around the country; and
- hazardous wastes had potential to cause significant adverse effects.

Following a study of hazardous waste management in five overseas countries, the Ministry for the Environment prepared of a discussion paper *Managing Hazardous Wastes*. This paper, released in November 1998, presented options for the management of hazardous waste in New Zealand.

Three main options for an overall hazardous waste management framework were presented. These were:

- (1) The establishment of ambient environmental standards as National Environmental Standards and improved Resource Management Act 1991 consent monitoring. (The term ambient environmental standards essentially means setting environmental bottom lines for contaminants in air, land and water.)
- (2) The establishment of acceptance criteria for hazardous waste disposal facilities through guidelines or regulations under the Resource Management Act 1991 and improved Resource Management Act consent monitoring, complemented by mandatory record keeping and an industry code of practice.
- (3) The establishment of hazardous waste acceptance criteria, ambient environmental standards under the Resource Management Act 1991, improved Resource Management Act consent monitoring, mandatory record keeping and an industry code of practice.

We are currently awaiting further developments from the Ministry for the Environment on this matter.

4. **Other Regional Councils**

Most regional councils in New Zealand have undertaken some form of collection of either agricultural chemical and/or household hazardous wastes. Wellington, Canterbury and West Coast Regional Councils have not yet taken such steps. Generally, of the chemicals collected, those that could be reused or redistributed have been. The remaining chemicals have been stockpiled while methods for their ultimate disposal can be found or arranged.

Six councils (Auckland Regional Council, Environment Bay of Plenty, Environment Waikato, Hawkes Bay Regional Council, Southland Regional Council and Tasman District Council) have formed a consortium and have been investigating disposal options both inside New Zealand and overseas. This group was recently in the news because of criticism it received from the Government and Greenpeace over a proposal to export waste to Europe for disposal.

The other councils with stockpiles of chemical are believed to be either waiting to see what happens with the consortiums initiative to export wastes or for local disposal options to become available.

5. Disposal Options

(1) Disposal in New Zealand

Over the past few years quite a number of companies have emerged in New Zealand with the notion of developing hazardous waste disposal facilities, using a variety of technologies. However, to date no company has established a hazardous waste disposal facility. A small number of companies have established operations that deal with specific parts of the hazardous waste stream, e.g., hydrocarbon contaminated soils.

There is a general feeling that there may not be sufficient demand in New Zealand for some technologies to be run on a commercially viable basis. A company would have to secure a fairly significant proportion of the hazardous waste disposal business (from both local authorities and private sources) for the operation to be viable.

(2) Disposal Overseas

Facilities to dispose of hazardous wastes are available in other parts of the world, mainly in the United Kingdom and Europe. These facilities are established and operating in accordance with strict environment requirements. The costs quoted for exporting wastes from New Zealand to Europe for disposal has reduced significantly over the past five years.

The availability of existing facilities to dispose of hazardous wastes and the reduced cost make this disposal option attractive to some parties within New Zealand.

6. Progress in the Wellington Region

Following the release of a report on hazardous waste management in the Wellington Region in April 1998, and upon the recommendation of the Environment Committee, a regional waste liaison group was established. This group comprises staff from the Regional Council and territorial authorities from throughout the Wellington Region. The principal tasks of this group were to develop proposals for a collaborative approach for hazardous waste management in the Region and to prepare recommendations for the Regional Council that could be considered in the next long-term financial strategy process.

The meetings of this group have also provided a forum for waste officers to meet and exchange ideas, and to explore opportunities for enhancing regional consistency in waste management.

This group has prepared a draft discussion paper that it is currently considering. This will form the basis for the recommendations it will put to the Regional Council. The proposed action plan in this paper is attached

7. Recommendation

That the report be received and its contents noted.

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

JOHN SHERRIFF
Manager, Resource Investigations

JANE BRADBURY
Divisional Manager, Environment

Attachments: 1