

Overview and Government response

The Victorian Government established the Former Lands Department Chemical Inquiry in response to former employees' concerns about the use of the chemicals 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) and 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T) throughout their employment. These workers were employed between 1965 and 1995 as weed sprayers and were concerned that exposure has had detrimental effects on their health.

2014

Former employees, the Australian Workers Union, and the Ballarat Courier raise concerns

Mid 2014

Election commitment made by Victorian Labor Party to establish an enquiry

November 2014

New Victorian Government elected

20 February 2015

The Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water announced the independent inquiry headed by Mr Greg Tweedly

March 2015

Inquiry formally began

11 November 2015

Inquiry was granted extension of time due to unexpectedly large volume of document and records to review

24 November 2015

The inquiry report was publicly released

March 2016

Release of Victorian Government response to the inquiry report

Government responded to concerns raised by the Ballarat community and established an independently-led inquiry, which:

- found that prior to 1981, it is **plausible** that exposure to 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD, a contaminant in 2,4,5-T) may cause non-Hodgkin lymphoma or soft tissue sarcoma;
- concluded that with so many possible causes of cancer, it is impossible to be absolutely certain that spraying exposure is one of those causes;
- found no risk of cancer for those sprayers exposed to 2,4-D; and
- made three recommendations to respond to the inquiry findings and build further on the evidence
 - 1 Update the Worker Health Study
 - 2 Provide health screening for current and former sprayers and
 - 3 Review current practices in departments and agencies engaged in spraying activities.

The inquiry examined over 100,000 pages of historical documents, 29 written submissions and a broad list of literature including scientific studies, legislation and standards. They conducted 76 interviews with former workers and their families.

Responding to the findings

The Victorian Government accepts and will act on the three recommendations made in the inquiry report. While the inquiry focused on the Ballarat area, the Government is committed to the highest levels of workplace safety and will apply its response across Victoria.

Our response aims to build on the work of the inquiry report to further investigate the ongoing health impact or otherwise of 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T on sprayers. We will provide greater certainty to current and former sprayers today and over the longer term as further evidence comes to light.

Next steps

Provide health screening for sprayers

The Government will endeavour to contact all former sprayers employed by Victorian departments and agencies between 1965 and 1995 to provide free health screening for a history of chloracne, soft tissue sarcoma and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

The Government will offer health screening tailored to the individual needs of the sprayers to ensure that they are informed of their access to health and other services, including follow up testing should this be required.

Update the Worker Health Study

The Government will work closely with a university to update the 1980s Worker Health Study using the same group of workers, as it may provide further evidence to support a link on the use of 2,4,5 T to soft tissue sarcoma and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

In the event a link is established, the evidence will be an important consideration in responding to those sprayers who agree to undertake health screening for a history of chloracne, soft tissue sarcoma and non-Hodgkin lymphoma and who return positive tests to these cancers.

Review current practices in departments and agencies engaged in spraying activities

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning will lead a review of current practices in all state departments and agencies engaged in spraying activities, to ensure they meet current standards. As part of this review, those departments and agencies will be asked to review their auditing processes, including compliance processes, for employees using or exposed to dangerous goods or hazardous substances. The review of current practices reinforces that the Government takes the safety of its workers very seriously and is committed to the highest levels of workplace safety and wellbeing. It will review its policies and practices to ensure that no failings from the period remain, particularly in relation to the use, handling and storage of chemicals by employees.

Establish a ministerial advisory committee

A ministerial advisory committee with members from the health, agricultural and workplace safety sectors will come together to oversee the roll out of the health screenings, the workplace practice review and next steps for the worker health study. Creating an advisory committee ensures sector-specific knowledge is captured, and issues represented.

Want to know more about the findings or health screenings?

Current and former employees can seek information and register to be contacted for the health screening at the customer service centre on **1800 987 767**

To find out more about the inquiry findings and view the Government's response, visit www.delwp.vic.gov.au/chemical_inquiry