

Timber Treatment Sites

How they can affect your land

Sawmilling and timber treatment, typically using preservatives, can have long-term effects on the soil.

Chemicals used for timber preservation

A range of chemicals is used to preserve timber. The process of treating timber, and storage of treated timber and chemicals, can lead to spillages and soil contamination.

Many chemicals, such as boron and copper-chrome-arsenic (CCA) mixtures are still in use today, while others are no longer used. Pentachlorophenol was used, either on its own or as an additive to other timber preservatives from the 1950s to 1988, and was withdrawn from use in the 1990s. Creosote has been used since the 1920s and now is primarily used for the treatment of wood for outdoor applications. Light organic solvent preservatives (LOSP) have also been used since the 1970s and remain in use today.

For more information on chemicals and processes used for timber treatment see www.nzwood.co.nz/learning-centre/treatments-wood-preservation/.

Previous investigations of timber treatment sites in Canterbury have shown higher concentrations of contaminants particularly near treatment sheds and drip pads, treated timber and chemical storage areas and sawdust disposal areas. In some cases, remediation of the site has been required to ensure suitability for residential or current land-use. The likely extent of contamination will depend on the size of the timber treatment facility, the extent of operations and the processes used.

Living on a former timber treatment site

Because we don't have information on individual properties where the land use is unverified, we can only provide general guidance about your land. Not all land which has been used for timber treatment will be contaminated.

The only way to find out is to have the soil tested by a suitably qualified and experienced practitioner.



Taking care

The Canterbury District Health Board advises anyone with a garden, regardless of whether the property is on the Listed Land Use Register, to follow some common sense precautions to minimise potential health risks when gardening or when children are playing outside. Visit www.cph.co.nz/your-health/contaminated-land/ for more information.

If you are weighing up whether to have the soil tested, think about the way you use your garden. If you follow the health board's common sense precautions, the risks are likely to be low.

The following activities may place you at slightly higher risk:

- you eat the eggs of your free range chickens
- you grow and eat root vegetables
- young children play in and may eat your garden soil.

If these activities apply, you may like to change your garden activities, or have the soil tested.

Drinking water quality

Residents in main towns in Canterbury are mostly on a reticulated water supply which means we use piped tap water for drinking and garden watering. All district council drinking water wells are monitored in accordance with the National Environmental Standard for Sources of Human Drinking Water, and by Environment Canterbury.

If you have a well supply contact Environment Canterbury for advice about having your water tested on 0800 677 748.

Responsibility for contaminated land

According to New Zealand property laws, if you own a property, you are responsible for any contamination problems with it, even if you did not cause them, or weren't aware of them when you bought your land. This is called the 'buyer beware' principle. If you are renting a property you can ask your landlord, to ensure your health and safety which he/she is bound to do under the Residential Tenancies Act 1986.

Environment Canterbury identifies land which may be contaminated from current or historical uses

Land uses which may be hazardous include former orchards and market gardens, landfills, timber treatment and other industrial sites where harmful chemicals were often used, stored or disposed of. Environment Canterbury records these sites on the Listed Land Use Register www.llur.ecan.govt.nz.

Not all land which has been used for these hazardous activities or industries will be contaminated. The only way to find out is to have the soil tested. For more information, visit www.ecan.govt.nz/HAIL.