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# Christchurch properties contaminated with lead top Environment Ministry's priority list

Joanne Carroll and Liz McDonald • 09:45, Oct 09 2018



IAIN MCGREGOR/STUFF

There are houses on all 22 of the Christchurch properties contaminated with lead.

## environment

An Official Information Act request revealed the 22 properties were at the top of the Ministry for the Environment's list of contaminated sites most needing remediation funding.

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The properties were in south Christchurch, but neither the ministry nor Environment Canterbury (ECan) would give their exact location to protect the privacy of the owners.

They have known about the contamination since mid-2015.

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ECan's principal science advisor Davina McNickel said the affected area was thought to have been a small quarry that was filled with waste material about the 1920s that appeared to be from a foundry. There were no records from that time as the land was privately owned.

Most of the houses on the land were built in the 1940s and 50s.

"The site came to our attention as there was a landowner doing some work in preparation for residential earthquake repairs works on their property," McNickel said.

Landowners tested the soil in May 2015 and shared the results with ECan, which further investigated the area.

ECan applied for funding to remediate the site from the Ministry for the Environment's Contaminated Sites Remediation Fund.

There are houses on all of the properties. Lead is the main contaminant of concern, McNickel said. In remediating the properties, all buildings and driveways would be kept in place, she said.

"We only need to remove or cover surface fill, [for example] gardens and lawn that people may have regular and/or direct contact with. Any material under the buildings and driveways will not be touched as people don't come into contact with these areas regularly."

They would not say where the properties were as the site involved "a few" private residential properties.



"However, the landowners are aware and if anyone was looking at buying one of these properties then they would be able to find this information out on our Listed Land Use Register."

McNickel expected the decision on funding would be made by the end of November with works to begin early next year. She could not give an estimate of cost because an open tender for works would be required.

She advised those living on a property with potentially contaminated soil to follow some "common sense precautions" to minimise potential health risks.

That included practising good personal hygiene, such as wearing gloves when gardening, washing hands and exposed skin after coming into contact with soil, keeping soil outside the house, and making sure children's play areas were not in exposed dirt. Having good grass cover and washing any home-grown fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating them was also advisable, she said.

Massey University applied environmental chemistry senior lecturer Nick Kim said the public had a right to know about contaminated sites.

"It's a terrible idea to leave it up to future buyers to look up a council register that they don't know exists," Kim said.

"It leaves buyers particularly vulnerable that they are expected to magically know that website is there. Not every buyer requests a LIM. Council would have hired a consultant to do a report. That should be made public if it was paid for by the ratepayers."

Only some local authorities attach contamination information to land information memorandum (LIM) reports.

In Canterbury, ECan maintains a Listed Land Use Register, which it describes as "a record of land which may be contaminated".

Duncan Terris, a Christchurch lawyer who chairs the New Zealand Law Society's property law section, said buyers being unaware of contamination risks was "certainly an issue".

Terris said that while property lawyers would normally check local contamination registers, family lawyers might not know to do so.

People buying homes at auction might only have a LIM report provided by a real estate agent and not have a chance for a lawyer's check at all.

Would-be buyers could make sure their lawyer checked for possible contamination, and could also check the register directly with ECan themselves.

"A lot of ECan reports include just the possibility of contamination, which is not entirely helpful. Councils like to protect themselves."

Without exact information the surest way for buyers to know if land was contamination was to have it tested themselves, Terris said.

University of Canterbury Professor Brett Robinson said lead contamination was common in New Zealand soils.

Lead paint, petrol and pesticides were widely used up to the 1980s.

"Lead is a cumulative poison. It is absorbed by the body and poorly excreted. It accumulates in the skeleton and slowly released in old age," he said.

"It has been linked to cognitive decline later in life. Lead is particularly harmful in children, the greatest risk is to children eating the soil."

**Studies** have shown lead exposure causes lower IQ, anaemia, loss of immunity and delinquency and criminal behaviour.

Vegetables do not absorb lead, but should be thoroughly washed to remove the soil. Robinson said it was nearly impossible to remove all the soil from root vegetables and they should be peeled.

ECan's factsheet on land contamination can be found online at: <http://llur.ecan.govt.nz/Public>

## Stuff

COMMENTS 12

## more from stuff

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annethompson@xtra.co.nz

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**From:** Sam Broughton <sam.broughton@selwyn.govt.nz>  
**Sent:** Friday, 9 February 2018 4:42 PM  
**To:** annethompson@xtra.co.nz  
**Cc:** Bernadette Ryan; Tim Harris  
**Subject:** Re: Follow up to our telephone conversation

Hi Anne

Thanks for your email. I have copied Tim Harris into this email as he will respond to your questions around the proposed quarry and process for the consent, commissioners, Selwyn/chch border, land zoning of quarry site ...

As far as our meeting and conversation I stand by my desire to see productive farmland remain that way and I think that small blocks which are mostly unproductive as far as economic contribution go are not a direction we should continue on.

That being said our current district plan, which we are in the process of reviewing and is where we may see a change, and regional plans as well as national legislation allow such subdivision. People also desire this size of property and so demand also plays a part.

Private property rights in NZ also mean that regardless of community expectations through council plans, a property owner can always propose an alternative use through the Resource Management Act which is what would happen if an application is received in this case.

A Private Members bill is something that MPs not Mayors or Councils lodge in Parliament. If our MP Amy Adams is already proposing that as you say then that process is actioned. There is no cost to our council or Christchurch City council for this.

Our council works collaboratively with Christchurch City and Waimakariri District through the Greater Christchurch Partnership on matters of City/Town Planning, Roading, and Healthcare.

I hope this clarifies some of your questions and Tim will be able to answer the others. You will hear from him shortly.

Cheers  
 Sam Broughton  
 Mayor of Selwyn

On 8/02/2018, at 8:02 PM, "annethompson@xtra.co.nz<mailto:annethompson@xtra.co.nz>"  
 <annethompson@xtra.co.nz<mailto:annethompson@xtra.co.nz>> wrote:

Hi Bernadette,

After talking to you earlier I noticed that the Mayor's email address is on the Selwyn website, so I have copied him in here although I realise you may get both copies if you monitor his emails for him.

My call today was a follow up to the meeting I had with Mr Broughton and the chief planning office last year, to discuss the councils intentions for the rural zoned land in Weedons. At that meeting I got the distinct impression that the council are fully committed to preserving the rural farming areas within the area.

Since that meeting Fulton Hogan have purchased a block of rural zoned land on Dawsons/Jones Roads, and have announced their intention to apply for a resource consent to quarry the land. I appreciate that this purchase had not

even gone through at the time of my meeting with the Mayor, but was extremely disappointed to find out that several exploratory permits had been issued to Fulton Hogan for this land over the last few years, and also for the CCC owned block over the road from their newly acquired block. This means that individuals at both the Selwyn and Christchurch councils were aware that there was interest in the land for quarrying.

Given that various quarries are already operating in both the Selwyn and Christchurch suburbs local to this area on land zoned for residential rural I am obviously extremely concerned that this is yet another covert attempt to turn more of the land that Mr Broughton himself had told me was regarded as important farming land for the region into quarry land.

Can I please ask whether the council has considered rezoning land on the extremities of the region for quarrying in order to stop the growth of the quarrying through the rural and not so rural residential areas of Christchurch and Selwyn?

It appears that there are several areas of land ownership by the quarries where one side of the road is owned by Christchurch and the other by Selwyn, and certainly I know that there is that divide with the block in question on Dawsons/Jones Road, where Christchurch residents are incensed at the thought of a quarry so near to their homes and schools, (as are Selwyn residents I hasten to add), but for which the responsibility for consideration of any resource consent application would fall onto the Selwyn council.

With that in mind can I ask whether Selwyn Council have considered teaming up with Christchurch council to lodge a Private Member's Bill to stop this covert land buy up and conversion to quarrying? I spoke today to Amy Adams local office, and was told that she had a meeting recently with Lianne Dialzeil and that she had discussed exactly that matter during the meeting – if Selwyn and Christchurch councils did it as a shared exercise it would certainly split the burden of cost, and would present a united front to the quarries, who seem to have adopted a 'divide and conquer' approach.

Should the quarry be allowed to open on the proposed site (and yes, I understand that no resource consent has yet been applied for) this will have a devastating impact on the crops and livestock grown for several KM's of surrounding farmland. I imagine that the chicken factories pump air into their barns, so this may well affect both the egg and meat aspects of their business. This will render the farming land locally worthless, even though Mr Broughton told me that Selwyn was committed to preserving it as rural farmland.

§ I know there is also concern amongst Christchurch residents local to these quarries with regards to the same people acting as 'independent' commissioners for the varying applications around the Christchurch quarries. Having looked at the Quality Planning organisations website (<http://www.qualityplanning.org.nz/index.php/plan-development-components/use-of-commissioners/guidance-on-the-use-of-independent-commissioners>), I notice that their 'good practice' guidelines advise "Where a council has many hearings that require the use of an independent commissioner over the course of a year, a pool of commissioners should be used; and the people appointed to hearings should be rotated to avoid perceptions of favouritism, or compromised commissioner independence." I do hope, should the need arise for the appointment of an independent commissioner, that Selwyn council will look at the list of 'Independent Commissioners' who have already worked on the Christchurch Council resource consents and choose to appoint someone who has no prior involvement in order that they can truly be an Independent Commissioner.

Should Mr Broughton wish to discuss any of the above matters in person I am available to come into meet with him again, but if not I would very much appreciate a response to this email and the matters I have raised.

Regards  
Anne Thompson