

18 HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES AND CONTAMINATED SITES

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18 HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES AND CONTAMINATED SITES

In addition to natural events, hazards are associated with hazardous facilities, ie the storage, use and transportation of hazardous substances. These facilities are commonly found in both the rural and urban parts of the District. Hazardous substances, like agricultural sprays, industrial chemicals or fuel, have properties which are, or when in contact with air or water are, potentially flammable or explosive, and toxic. If hazardous facilities are not located appropriately or managed properly, the accidental release of, or loss of control of, hazardous substances can cause short or long term damage to human health and contamination of land, water, air, or damage to ecosystems.

18.1 ISSUES

18.1.1 Identification of Hazardous Substances

Information on the location of hazardous facilities and their impact on people and communities and the environment is not complete. Most of the known hazardous facilities are located in the urban area of Whanganui. The majority of these are in industrial areas, with other concentrations in commercial areas, eg service stations. Location of hazardous facilities in residential areas is increasing. This is associated with home occupations. In the rural areas, agrichemicals are commonly stored on farms.

A number of sites in the District have been identified as potentially contaminated, assessed and confirmed as contaminated or formerly contaminated.

Contaminated sites are sites where hazardous substances occur in concentrations which are likely to pose an immediate or long term hazard to human health or the environment. Sites of this nature may have been used in the past, or are being used, for industrial processing, storage of hazardous substances, or dumping of hazardous wastes. This has implications for the Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council, Council, land owner, occupier, polluter and neighbouring land owners/occupiers. The Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council has identified through its Regional Policy Statement the need to prepare a regional inventory of contaminated sites. Council, along with the Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council, has an active responsibility in contaminated sites' management. Once comprehensive information is available, Whanganui District Council may instigate a Plan change if appropriate, require redevelopment of the land or initiate other enforcement action.

Part of this issue is the recognition and realisation that many of the methods used for the disposal of hazardous waste in the past have been inadequate.

Many facilities are either inappropriately sited or unable to cope with the increased levels of waste being deposited. Accordingly, the Whanganui District has few suitable facilities available for the disposal of hazardous waste and the District lacks a dedicated hazardous waste treatment facility. This is also recognised as a national and regional waste management issue.

Identification and recognition of hazards is an essential part of risk management. Action is required to:

- a. Improve the information base regarding hazards in the District, including natural hazards and contaminated sites.
- b. Increase community knowledge and awareness of risks.
- c. Establish the level of risk that the community is prepared to accept to guide future development.

18.1.2 Reduction of Hazardous Substances

With respect to hazardous substances and facilities, and the risk they pose, the hazard is principally defined by the characteristics of the intrinsic properties of the substances and facilities, eg flammability of chemicals and their storage areas. The risk is defined by the probability of occurrence combined with the potential effects of that occurrence.

It is not possible to control the properties of hazardous substances. However, it is possible to reduce the hazard potential to protect human life, property and the environment.

To reduce hazard potential, the following matters need to be addressed:

- a. The location, design and operation of new hazardous facilities in environmentally sensitive areas and areas with high concentrations of population.
- b. Protection of existing developments in high risk areas.

Coordinate actions between the Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council and Council having regard to the provisions of the Regional Policy Statement for Manawatu-Wanganui:

- a. Contaminated sites – This is an issue where there is dual responsibility between the regional and district councils. The District Council will address contaminated site issues as they arise through resource consent processes and will otherwise liaise with the Regional Council to ensure coordinated responses to this issue.

18.2 POLICIES (not yet reviewed)

18.2.1 Contaminated Soils

Ensure that land affected by contaminants in soil is appropriately identified and assessed at the time of being developed and if necessary managed, which may include remediation , or containment , to make land fit for the purpose for which the land is proposed to be used.

18.2.2 Community Awareness of Hazards

Promote better community knowledge and awareness of risks associated with hazardous facilities.

A fundamental requirement of risk management is knowledge about the location and impact of natural hazards and hazardous facilities on people, communities and the environment, and awareness about the degree of risk present.

Traditionally, there is reluctance to identify and recognise hazards as development constraints. This is due to a lack of, or inadequate, knowledge and information, and concern that the identification of hazards can alarm people and reduce the value of properties. However, not recognising the presence of hazards can also lead to increased risks of environmental damage, property damage or loss of life.

Current information about hazards and associated risks is limited and not readily available. Work will be required to extend, update and continuously monitor and review the information available. While it may not be possible to provide definitive or predictive information about hazards and their associated risks, the availability of information should be regarded as a trigger mechanism, or a warning system, for potential land owners and developers.

This policy represents a long term, indirect approach to risk management. It requires resources to be devoted to information gathering and establishing links with the community. There are existing mechanisms which can be tapped into for implementation, eg civil defence activities, use of Project Information Memoranda and Land Information Memoranda etc.

The use of cleaner and safer production guidelines will complement District Plan conditions and terms.

The guidelines will be voluntary and self-regulating. They will be particularly useful for small industrial or commercial operators or home occupations involving the use of hazardous substances.

The approach is also consistent with the requirements of section 35 of the Resource Management Act 1991.

18.2.3 Manage Hazardous Facilities

Ensure the location, design and management of all new hazardous facilities can meet identified safety standards.

Facilities or activities involving hazardous substances may cause adverse environmental effects when the substances are not adequately controlled and escape into the environment. Such releases, whether accidental or brought about by poor management practices, may cause environmental contamination and damage, and endanger human health, and cause damage to or loss of property.

To avoid, remedy and mitigate potential adverse environmental effects, these facilities and activities need to be located appropriately and managed correctly. The site design, layout and operational management procedures can greatly affect the risks to people and the environment from hazardous facilities.

Due to the high risks and seriousness of potential damage to human life and the environment, specific controls relating to the location, design and management of hazardous facilities are considered necessary and appropriate. Such controls are considered effective in directly influencing the nature and scale of adverse effects and the level of risk presented by hazardous facilities.