



Media Release
Wednesday 12 November 2014

Councils carry out soil testing at Darfield subdivision

Selwyn District Council and Environment Canterbury will undertake a soil testing programme at a Darfield subdivision to establish whether properties may be affected by historic land contamination.

Staff from the two councils have been visiting property owners in the Stanwood Grove subdivision this week to advise them about the soil testing programme and to seek permission for soil sampling.

The testing programme has been established after soil tests results were carried out by some Stanwood Grove property owners.

“The recent test results show that at one property arsenic is present in the soil at levels noticeably higher than the national environmental standards and at two property levels are slightly higher than recommended levels,” says John Christensen, Environmental Services Manager at Selwyn District Council,

“At this stage we consider the potential risk to residents from any contamination is low. For householders carrying out everyday activities on a property it is unlikely that the level of contamination will be high enough to result in any health issues.”

Mr Christensen says it is likely the contamination is the result of the historic operation of a sheep dip and sale yards, which were in use on part of the subdivision site from the 1880s up until the early 1940s.

“Our priority now is to undertake soil sampling throughout the subdivision to find out more about the other properties, including whether any contaminants are detected, where they are and at what levels.

“Our number one concern is to provide residents with information and to protect their safety, which is why we are talking to the residents and seeking their permission to take samples and carry out the testing programme.”

Mr Christensen says the subdivision, comprising 23 properties, was originally developed in 2004 to 2005. Because of the known history of the site the developer was required to provide a site contamination assessment as part of the consent process.

That assessment, which was carried out by an independent consultant for the developer indicated the presence of arsenic, but recommended that it was safe to proceed with the subdivision.

Selwyn District Council and Environment Canterbury will review the original assessment as part of the current investigation, to find out why the more recent testing appears to have produced different results.

Around 20 properties in Stanwood Grove and five properties in the adjacent Pemberton subdivision, closest to where the historic sheep dip was located, will be tested. Selwyn District Council will pay for the testing programme.

Environment Canterbury team leader contaminated sites Davina McNickel says specialists will visit properties to collect up to four soil samples at various locations and depths from around from the properties using a hand auger – a hand held drilling tool.

She says all sites will be left as they were before the sampling and no samples will be collected from paths, driveways or paved areas.

“We will let residents know these results and what, if anything, the recommended next steps are within four to five weeks of the testing.

“It is important this is done so people know how to manage their land in a way that keeps them, their family and their pets from being exposed to potential contaminants.”

McNickel says Environment Canterbury has a legal obligation to identify any potentially contaminated land.

A range of information on the testing programme, background to the site and health information has also been given to residents.

Ends

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Attached backgrounder: Q&A – Information for residents