

NZEI WEST AUCKLAND AERIAL SPRAYING SURVEY

New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI) West Auckland. This is the Primary sector teachers union. This survey deals with the effects of the aerial spraying of the painted apple moth on teachers and pupils in west Auckland schools. The survey was carried out during February 2003.

Background

Due to a number of concerns that were brought to the attention of the west Auckland NZEI Committee of Management by a number of members, a decision was made to survey west Auckland schools in order to ascertain concrete information regarding the effects of aerial spraying currently being undertaken by MAF in the west Auckland area. NZEI formatted two questionnaires, one for general staff and one for principals. The analysis of the results follows the following format. Firstly, the question, secondly the data analysis. Staff were asked two questions and a space was provided for comment. Principals were asked three questions and were then invited to comment on the effect the spraying has had on their schools.

RESULTS OF GENERAL STAFF SURVEY

Every school in west Auckland was sent a copy of the survey and the NZEI received 320 responses.

Question 1

Have you experienced adverse effects from the spray?

Y	N
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 Comment

Data Analysis

181 answered yes 56%
139 answered no 44%

The general comments of those who answered yes varied greatly. Many cited serious health effects, rashes, nausea, persistent coughing, breathlessness, asthma attacks, mucous in nose and throat, tightness in chest, difficulty in breathing, allergic (histamine) reactions, swollen and sore throats, sores around mouth, watery eyes and bronchial problems. Often, many of these symptoms lasted for days and even weeks and recurred on subsequent spray days. One teacher enclosed a statement from her doctor that indicated that "her ill health seems to be coinciding with PAM spray". The doctors diagnosis was Chronic Rhinitis. Many teachers stated they had observed many of the above reactions in the children under their care. Other comments related to serious disruptions in daily programmes during spray periods, frustration, stress and pressure became extreme for many teachers when children were kept inside classrooms with windows closed on very hot days. Children often became disruptive. Many activities

had to be cancelled, sports, swimming and outdoor activities. It was stated that children became anxious and scared of low flying aircraft.

The vast majority of those who answered no, stated in the general comments that they had experienced similar disruptions on spray days. Many also stated that they had observed many adverse reactions from the children in their care and had also observed many of the listed reactions in their colleagues. Others stated that they were genuinely concerned about the effects the spray was having on the community. A proportion made no comment at all, a small amount believed the spray had no effect at all. One response stated that we all needed to “toughen up”.

Question 2

Has the spray caused you to be absent from school? Y N

Data Analysis

Of the 320 responses to this question:

30 answered yes	9%
290 answered no	91%

Many stated in their general comments the words “not yet”. Some stated that they tolerated their illnesses or reactions to the spray and simply came into work. Others felt uncomfortable about asking for time off on spray days.

RESULTS OF PRINCIPALS SURVEY

Every school in west Auckland was sent a copy of the survey and the NZEI received 33 responses.

Question 1

Have you noticed an increase in staff absenteeism on spray days?

Y N

Data Analysis

5 answered yes	15%
28 answered no	85%

Many principals in their general comments mentioned a lack of relievers and the financial burden on the school of allowing staff to be absent during spray days. One school stated in 2002 it had several teachers who were pregnant and chose to remain at home on spray days. The school emphasized that financially this put a severe strain on their relief budget.

Question 2

Have you noticed an increase in pupil absenteeism on spray days?

Y	N	Comment
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Data Analysis

Of the 33 principals that responded:

22 answered yes	66%
11 answered no	33%

Many principals stated they had received expressions of concern from parents who wanted assurances that children would be kept indoors during spray periods. A typical response was “disrupted sports programmes” and “created concern among the parent community”. Most schools experienced an increase.

Question 3

Have you noticed any specific reactions to the spray as obviously being related?

Yes	No	Comment
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Data Analysis

Of the 33 principals who responded:

12 answered yes	36%
21 answered no	64%

Some principals stated in their general comments that they lacked the necessary medical knowledge to effectively answer the question. Others were very specific, citing asthma related problems, breathing difficulties, coughing, eczema, and watery eyes.

Question 4

What effect has the spray had on your school?

Data Analysis

Principals were asked to comment in writing. Only 2 principals stated that the spray had no effect on their schools. Most stated they experienced severe disruptions to the programme during spray periods. Some stated that children became hysterical. Most stated that huge pressure was put on staff and pupils who had to be kept inside with windows closed on hot days. Staff at times were exposed to the spray as they were on crossing duty. Sports events and swimming often had to be cancelled on spray days. Many children became anxious, not wishing to drink from school taps. Principals noticed many children were traumatized by the low flying aircraft. Health problems were also cited, which have already been included in Question 3.

Conclusion

The results of the NZEI survey raise some very serious concerns about the aerial spraying of the painted apple moth in the west Auckland area. It is clear that MAF's method of dealing with the moth is causing a variety of health problems for teachers and pupils alike. The survey also clearly shows that spraying is causing severe disruption to our children's learning.

Based on the evidence contained here, the NZEI Committee of Management West Auckland calls for the immediate cessation of the aerial spraying programme.

We call on the Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard, and Prime Minister Helen Clarke, to immediately intervene and effect the above.

We call on Waitakere City Council to pursue every means necessary to stop the aerial spraying using any powers it may have under the Public Health Act to prohibit the aerial spraying method. We believe the body of evidence contained in the NZEI survey can be used as evidence based on which the Waitakere City Council can enact these powers.

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