

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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Timing of advice to residents appropriate, says EPA

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The EPA first became aware of potential contamination in domestic groundwater bores last week, not 18 months ago as some media reports today have claimed.

While contamination on the former Hills Industries site on South Road was known in August 2009, there was no evidence that contamination existed in known domestic groundwater bores until February 14.

Environment Protection Authority Chief Executive Helen Fulcher said the EPA stood by the timing of its notification.

“Identifying the nature and extent of contamination is a complex process. Testing began at the source site 18 months ago and methodically moved outwards from the source. The information has come to us progressively as more testing is done,” Ms Fulcher said.

“As soon as the EPA became aware of new monitoring data that showed domestic groundwater bores were affected we urgently worked with health officials to assess the implications of that data and determine the extent of the affected area so that we could notify residents as quickly as possible, which we have done this week.

“We have to make a judgment as to when to notify the public and we do that once we have sufficient evidence to indicate there may be a potential risk. This particular area only became of concern to us last week when we received new data.”

The EPA has managed a number of contamination issues in recent years, mostly arising from historic industrial practices where contamination occurred many years before modern environmental practices were in place. There is a standard process for investigating these type of incidents, set out in national guidelines.

“In order to determine the nature and extent of any contamination, testing needs to be done in a methodical way.”

Other points:

- While the Forbes school is some distance from the source and its bore is in a deeper aquifer than where the contamination has been found, the EPA has nevertheless tested the school's water as a precaution. Results are due next week.
- Of 2200 homes, 33 have registered bores, but it is possible unregistered bores exist so the EPA has taking the precaution of writing to all residents in the area.
- Not all homes with bores in the affected area may have contaminants in their groundwater. However all residents with bores have been asked to cease use as it reduces the potential for the contaminated plume to be drawn further away from the site.
- The Department of Health issues a standard advice that people should have their bore water tested before using it for any purpose.