



Department of Environment
Land, Water & Planning

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Ref: MIN013321



[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Dear [REDACTED]

PHOS-CHEK FIRE RETARDANT

I refer to your letter dated 20 January 2015 to the Premier regarding Phos-Chek retardant. As this issue falls within my responsibilities as the Chief Fire Officer, your correspondence has been forwarded to me for response.

Fire retardant continues to be used to assist our bushfire suppression efforts in accordance with our aviation services procedures. Careful preparation, planning and execution is undertaken by our trained experts to ensure that it's use is done to avoid impact on people, houses, infrastructure and the environment. The Incident Controller during an incident has the authority to make decisions on the use of retardant and is the best qualified person to make decisions on how to use this bushfire suppression technique.

Current department policy is to follow the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) policy to only use fire retardant chemical approved by the USA Department of Agriculture (USDA). The only chemical currently approved by the USDA is Phos-Chek, which is manufactured by ICL Performance Products in the USA and distributed throughout Australia by their agent, PC Australasia Pty Ltd.

In 2000 the Department commissioned CSIRO to investigate the environmental risks of the use of retardants to assist wildfire control in Victoria. The report concluded that "The fire retardant Phos-Chek is a long term type of fire retardant that is approved for use in natural environments by the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service," and that "the potential risk to public health is considered to be very small... Phos- Chek components can be considered to have low short-term toxicity and very low risk of long term/delayed toxicity to humans...none of the chemicals in Phos- Chek have propensity to accumulate in biological systems."

As part of the response to the Wye River -Jamiesons Track fire, retardant was used directly on the fire edge and on steep ridgelines during initial attack and to strengthen strategic lines on ridgetops. Application was carefully considered to avoid impact on waterways. The majority of aircraft usage in proximity to Wye River- Separation Creek involved large volume helicopters using sea water from the ocean.

Environment Protection Authority (EPA) South West Region Environment Protection Officers undertook monitoring of water quality to assess any risks to human health related to the bushfires in Wye River and the surrounding areas of Kennett River, Separation Creek and Cumberland River.

Water quality monitoring (in-situ) has been conducted on a weekly basis since the fires. This measures dissolved oxygen (DO), pH, temperature, electrical conductivity (EC), ammonia and turbidity. All in-situ sampling has been within the normal range expected for this type of waterway.

We trust that this letter answers your queries.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted signature]

Chief Fire Officer