

Question on Notice
No. 549
Asked on 20 April 2006

MR WELLS asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)-

QUESTION:

- (1) How many audits or inspections has his department done in the last year or other indicative period at the Narangba Industrial Estate and how many at Steritech?
- (2) Will he advise of safeguards in place to ensure the safety of the local community?

ANSWER:

I note that this question concerns the Narangba Industrial Estate and particularly Steritech Pty Ltd so, although my department regulates a number of safety matters across the State, it would appear that the subject of this question is primarily radiation safety and, to a lesser extent, food safety.

- (1) Queensland Health has conducted a number of visits of an audit or inspectorial nature to the Narangba Industrial Estate during the last few years. The company of interest during these visits has been Steritech Pty Ltd, and the prime reason for the visits has been to assure ourselves that radiation safety expectations are being realised. Some of these visits have been scheduled and some have been unannounced. In 2004 and 2005, there were three visits each year and, to date, there have been two visits this year. Additionally, there has been one visit this year in relation to food safety.
- (2) Radiation Safety measures specifically at Steritech Pty Ltd include:
 - The primary radiation safety measure is the very substantial building and its specifically designed radiation safety features. Radiation levels outside the irradiation chamber continue to be indistinguishable from natural background levels;
 - The facility is operated in accordance with the radiation safety and protection plan specifically approved for the facility by Queensland Health. Amongst other things, this plan incorporates the details of the initial and on-going training of the staff. These training arrangements have also been specifically approved by Queensland Health; and
 - The radiation safety and protection plan and the standards which the building, and the radiation sources in the building, must meet are some of the many requirements of the Radiation Safety Act 1999 which are applicable to the activities of Steritech Pty Ltd. To date, Steritech is demonstrably complying with all of its obligations under the Act.

The radiation regulatory unit in Queensland Health, the Radiation Health Unit, has, and will continue to, inspect the facility each time radiation sources are delivered to Steritech Pty Ltd to ensure that radiation safety goals are achieved. Further, additional matters such as the training of staff, and the acquisition and transport of radioactive sources, will continue to be closely controlled and monitored by Queensland Health.

In addition to safety features, the security arrangements in facilities such as those owned by Steritech Pty Ltd are an important factor in ensuring the safety of the local community. Queensland Health is involved in the development of a Code of Practice on the Security of Radioactive Sources which will be published by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency once it has been finalised. This document and its regulatory impact statement was available for public comment for approximately two months until 28 April 2006, and it is expected that the Code will be published sometime this year.

The Narangba Industrial Estate is expanding and it is occupied by a number of industries using hazardous materials. The regulation of these industries is overseen by a number of departments. Interdepartmental liaison about hazardous materials is facilitated by the Government's Interdepartmental Hazardous Substances Coordinating Committee, hosted by the Department of Emergency Services. Queensland Health has two representatives on this committee. One of the current topics being discussed by this committee is the Narangba Industrial Estate. In this way my department links with other hazardous materials regulators to ensure hazards in the Narangba Industrial Estate are managed appropriately.