

**Question on Notice
No. 584
Asked on 18 April 2007**

QUESTION:

MR CRIPPS asked the Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism (Ms Nelson-Carr)—

With reference to concerns about the dangerously high lead levels recorded by independent tests in Townsville—

- (1) What is her department's response?
- (2) What investigations are taking place to identify the source?
- (3) What further monitoring is taking place?

ANSWER:

- (1) The Townsville Bulletin on 4 April 2007 claimed that an independent test showed that levels of lead, copper and zinc found in a sample were many times higher than the concentrations you would normally expect to find in soil. The EPA cannot provide any meaningful comment on the analytical result submitted by the Townsville Bulletin, as it was the result of a single test with no information regarding who, where, how or when the sample was taken. It is not possible to draw any conclusion from this information.

The EPA conducted a comprehensive dust investigation in the Townsville area in response to complaints about black dust from North Ward and Yarrawonga residents. The investigation included a specialised program involving five dust monitoring stations for continuous sampling over a period of 12 months as well as the collection of additional samples for chemical analysis. This analysis revealed a predominance of mould spores, as well as quartz particles, occasional iron rust flakes, soot and plant debris. Results of the investigation, concluded that dust deposition rates were well within the relevant dust standards. A Queensland Health review found that the dust did not present any health risks.

- (2) The dust investigation undertaken by the EPA was comprehensive and was carried out over a considerable period of time. It needed to be, to ensure the best outcome for the community including seasonal and climatic variations.

Claims of dust from Townsville's Port activities were first brought to the attention of the EPA in 2004. Townsville Port Authority undertook the initial investigation and the EPA commenced its investigation into the matter in 2005.

The EPA investigations did not identify any significant dust nuisance or heavy metal contamination impacts in the Townsville Area.

(3) The EPA is now reviewing current and proposed air monitoring in Townsville to assist in the establishment of a strategic air monitoring program. This program will sample air-borne particulates (dust) and will include analysis of samples for heavy metals.

The program will look at the quantity and characterisation of air-borne particulates within the general city area, rather than focussing on individual properties or complainants. As seasonal variations are relevant, the monitoring program is expected to be carried out over at least a 12-month period.

The Townsville Port Authority is also planning an additional monitoring program, the EPA is liaising with Townsville Port Authority to ensure that the programs will not involve unnecessary duplication, and will be complimentary.

The EPA also maintains three continuous air monitoring stations in Townsville. Currently these stations are located at the Townsville Port, Stuart and the inner suburb of Pimlico. Current and historical results of that monitoring are available on the EPA's website:
http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/environmental_management/air/air_quality_monitoring