

# Health Notice

From the Incident Management Team

## Possible risk to community due to fire/fume exposure

We spoke to some of you at a community meeting last Wednesday night and promised to investigate and action your concerns around activities occurring at Puke Coal and any health risks to your community.

A preliminary public health risk assessment completed late yesterday has identified the potential for increased

levels of toxic chemicals (dioxins) in the Pukemiro/Glen Afton area due to fire/fumes from the Puke Coal site.

This is based on a report from ESR (Institute of Environmental Science and Research) on a similar event overseas.

The health risks are specific to pregnant and breastfeeding women and not other residents.

### Pregnant and breastfeeding women

The levels of dioxins observed in the similar overseas event present a potential risk for unborn and breastfeeding babies.

Although the levels have not yet been confirmed, as a precautionary measure we are advising pregnant and breastfeeding women to seek accommodation outside of the affected area, at least 3 kilometres from the site. This is recommended until environmental testing shows whether dioxin levels are elevated, or until the fire is extinguished.

We're asking you to seek accommodation with family or friends. Think about what to take with you. If you are unable to find alternative accommodation with friends or family outside of the area you should contact 0800 492 452. Those who are temporarily relocated will be kept informed regularly as we work through this. There is no current recommended examination or medical test necessary, or that will provide useful information at this time.

### All other residents

For all other residents, the advice remains the same—if the smoke is thick or if you are affected by the smoke or odour, close windows, doors, and shut off ventilation systems in your house and avoid going outside. The potential risk outlined above specifically relates to **pregnant and breastfeeding women only**.

Smoke may irritate eyes, nose, throat and airways. Symptoms can include runny or sore eyes, dry or sore throat, sore nose, cough, tightness of the chest or difficulty breathing.

In healthy people, most symptoms disappear soon after exposure to smoke ends and do not cause long-term health problems. However, if your symptoms persist, phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 for free 24-hour health advice or see your doctor.

If you have asthma, lung or heart disease, seek medical help if your symptoms worsen and do not respond to your usual measures or if you experience breathlessness or chest pain.

***If you have health concerns, phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 for free 24-hour health advice, see your GP or speak to your midwife.***

Your GP can assess your symptoms and ensure you receive appropriate care. Your GP will notify Public Health if they believe your symptoms are related to the fire.

If you have one or more of the symptoms described above, you will be able to visit your regular GP for a visit that will be of no cost.

***Let the doctor know that you are from the Pukerimo/Glen Afton area where the Puke coal fire is.***

### **Expecting visitors?**

Advise them of this latest development and if they're pregnant or breastfeeding, let them know they should stay away for now.

### **Feeling anxious?**

Call or text 1737 any time on any day of the week if you're feeling anxious and need to talk. It's free and you'll be in contact with a trained counsellor.

### **How have we got here?**

Our actions, among others, from the community meeting were to look into what research and information is available and take action.

Our research and discussions with international colleagues about the Puke Coal fire led us to a similar case study of a large landfill fire in Iqaluit, Canada.

The report on that fire found that the concentrations of air pollutants that were monitored daily for air quality standards were not dramatically impacted. However, potentially toxic substances including dioxins (a group of toxic chemical compounds that are harmful to health) were elevated as a result of the fire.

This report was evaluated by ESR (Institute of Environmental Science and Research) this week which made recommendations to the Waikato District Health Board yesterday afternoon.

The Waikato District Health Board provided a recommendation advising that pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding should avoid, or minimise as far as practicable, their exposure to smoke from the fire. This was also the advice given during the Iqaluit fire in Canada.

A review of the data available tells us that the Pukemiro landfill fire could potentially result in similar daily dioxin concentrations within a few kilometres of the Puke Coal site.

It's important to note that the Canadian data clearly showed high daily dioxin concentrations during the fire but they returned to normal levels once the fire was out.

In addition to all of this, we are continuing to work with the land owner and all relevant agencies to get the fire out.

***We acknowledge these are stressful times. Kia kaha. We will keep you informed.***



## **Key contacts**

Waikato District Council on 0800 492 452 if you require support to be relocated

Waikato Tainui/Waahi Pa on 0800 TAINUI if you require support to be relocated

Healthline on 0800 611 116

If you're feeling stressed or anxious, text or call 1737.