

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio

Additional Estimates, February 2011

Program: Division or Agency: 2.1: EQD

Question No: 24

Broad Topic: Tree deaths from Hexazinone

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or Written Question:

Senator Siewert asked:

I refer to the outcome of an investigation into tree deaths on WA in 2007. The investigation found that spraying Hexazinone on weeds in Council sumps in a drought stricken area resulted in the death of surrounding trees.

1. Is the Department aware of the investigation and its outcomes?
2. Does the Department agree with the findings of this investigation, namely that the use of Hexazinone in drought conditions lead to tree deaths?
3. Given the potential impact on biodiversity, has the Department taken any measures to raise awareness of the impact of Hexazinone use during dry periods?
4. Will the Department be undertaking any work to better understand how drought/dryness alters the impact of pesticides and other chemicals on non-targeted flora and fauna?

Answer:

1. The Department provided advice to the national regulator of agricultural chemicals, the Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), in May 2007 concerning reports of widespread damage to trees by the use of hexazinone to control weeds around storm water collection sumps in the northern suburbs of Perth. The Department understands that local authorities determined that the damage resulted from misapplication of the chemical by contractors.
2. The Department's advice to the APVMA was that the reported damage probably was caused by contractors not using the chemical in accordance with label instructions. The effects of which probably were exacerbated by drought stress.
3. The Department advised the APVMA to recommend to local authorities that they consider the use of an alternative herbicide for weed control around sumps that is less toxic to trees and a lower risk for groundwater contamination. State and territory authorities are responsible for ensuring that chemicals registered by the APVMA are used correctly.
4. No further work is planned. The current label for hexazinone warns of the risks to native vegetation and that toxic effects may be slow to appear if application is made to dry soil or in dry conditions.