

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 3

Output Group: 3.2 – Assistance for science collaboration and innovation

DEST Question No. E141_04

Senator Allison asked on 4 June 2003, EWRE Hansard page 377

Question:

Dust suppression is another major area of some controversy. The report does not mention that at least on one occasion the dust was extremely thick, so thick that I gather that officers were evacuated from there by the health physicist to more than a kilometre from the work site. Why would a fairly significant incident not be reported in the report, do you think?

Answer:

Dust storms

The Maralinga Rehabilitation Technical Advisory Committee (MARTAC) report satisfactorily covers the issue of soil-resuspension. It is reported that on fifteen occasions work ceased during soil removal operations because of poor visibility caused by dust levels during regional and local dust storms. Of necessity, this involved the “evacuation” of plant operators to a location more than one kilometre from the work site. These fifteen “evacuations” arose from dust levels reducing visibility to such an extent that safe and efficient plant operation was in question and was not allowed to continue.

Further details relating to dust storms are given in the Project Manager’s report (Attachment 4.4 of the MARTAC report). It is reported that, in the case of the dust storm illustrated in Photograph 8.28, work was stopped because of dust levels generated by a 65 kilometre/hour wind. As the photograph shows this wind was from the north. While strong north winds were, during the soil operation at Taranaki, a lot less common than southerly winds, they are not a rare event or out of the ordinary (see Figure 9, Appendix 1.1, MARTAC report, and, in particular, the data for 700 observations for 3 pm during summer).

The lung monitoring, plant cabin air sampling, and environmental air sampling data presented in Chapter 5 of the MARTAC report demonstrates conclusively that there were no radiological concerns associated with the dust levels.