

1998 CHEMICAL COLLECTION CAMPAIGN

Background

Local Government is the Government of and for the people at a local level, and therefore Local Government is historically the authority that most people refer to when they have a need for a service or assistance.

Many Local Government authorities have sought to work with their community to address important local environmental issues, and it was this desire to provide an essential service to the local community that led to Parry Shire Council and Tamworth City Council operating a pilot chemical collection campaign in May of 1998.

The success of the initial campaign proved a catalyst for nineteen (19) of the twenty (20) member Councils from throughout the North-West Region of the State to embark on an ambitious Regional campaign under the banner of the Northern Inland Regional Waste group (NIRW), with the first campaign held in May of 1999.

Councils were aware of the rhetoric that has occurred at State and Federal levels supposedly to address the issue of orphaned, unwanted and outdated chemicals. The North-West Councils took the view that they could not just sit around waiting for action by such authorities, when the community was seeking an opportunity to do the 'right thing' in the management and disposal of hazardous chemical waste.

Objective of the Campaign

Reduce the amount of unwanted and hazardous chemicals entering local landfills or entering the liquid waste stream. Provide community members with the opportunity to dispose of unwanted and banned chemicals safely and in an environmentally responsible manner.

Initiating a Campaign

It is important to canvas the level of interest and commitment through a network or group of local Councils.

Issues that can be addressed when initiating discussion include:-

Is there a problem?

Local Councils are likely to be aware of the level of demand for disposal of chemical waste. Liaison with agricultural outlets, Environment Protection Authority office, Public Health Unit or WorkCover Authority may provide essential information.

Canvas what can be done about the problem.

Local Councils are generally committed to serving their local community and protecting the local environment. A chemical collection is generally easy to sell to the elected representatives as the service is a positive and newsworthy program to protect the health of residents and the environment.

Enthusiasm is contagious and the success of implementing such a campaign must start with the staff. The NIRW group of Councils were blessed to have a group of enthusiastic and conscientious Council representatives from all spheres of Local Government.

Determine a Position

Through the network group, establish a position on the subject and develop an action plan to promote your initiative further.


- ➔ Appoint a Campaign Coordinator from a Council with a reasonable resource base.*
- ➔ Appoint a taskforce to investigate options.*
- ➔ Group/Network Councils representatives to take initiative to respective Councils to seek endorsement to participating in a campaign.*

What problem do you wish to deal with?

Consideration had to be given to the products that Councils were prepared to deal with eg household, agricultural, institutional, commercial and industrial product. After considering the perceived problem it was agreed that the campaign needed to be as flexible as possible.

North-West Councils generally focused on household chemicals with many rural based Councils accepting agricultural product. Commercial and industrial product was generally only accepted by prior arrangement under a full user pays principle and in close consultation with the Contractor.

Action Plan

Having determined that a campaign is to be held the Co-ordinating taskforce can be vested with the  responsibility of implementing an action plan. Issues that need to be addressed include:-

Establish and confirm participation level.

Member Councils were requested to confirm interest in participating in the campaign to allow costings to be developed and collection routes to be designed.

How will collection be conducted?

NIRW considered options on the extent of involvement by a contractor; eg to collect, transport and dispose of product. Due to the inherent enthusiasm of member Councils, the group decided to carry out the collection component of the campaign to save costs for Council and communities, and engage a contractor to transport and effect disposal of the collected waste.

Selecting a suitable contractor

NIRW considered a couple of options about how it would select a suitable contractor including tendering, selective tendering, expression of interest and quotations. The group ultimately invited quotations from three (3) highly reputable companies to carry out the transport and disposal of the collected product.

Determining a suitable campaign date and days.

NIRW decided to hold its campaign over a weekend to suit as many people as possible. Prevailing weather conditions were determined as being most favourable in May (not too hot or too cold and driest month of the year).

Training needs for participating Councils

It was recognised that training in chemical identification, handling and personal safety was an essential component of the program if Councils were to safely and successfully undertake the collection component of the campaign.

Operational Plan

The co-ordinating Council may implement the operational plan in consultation with the taskforce. The NIRW group nominated Parry Shire Council as the co-ordinating Council who undertook the following actions:-

Engagement of Contractor

An invitation was extended to three (3) reputable contractors to provide pricing options for the transport and disposal of collected product. The successful contractor was endorsed at a meeting of the NIRW on the recommendation of the taskforce. The group considered the package offered by contractors and the cost implications. Key factors that influenced the NIRW selection of Envirochem Technology of Victoria included:-

Simplicity of service-

- ➔ - *The contractor was required to supply and deliver all containers for packaging of collected product a week in advance of campaign to all product collection sites;*

The contractor was to return and remove all collected products for transport to a processing/disposal facility within 72 hours of collection being completed.

➔ *Availability/Advisory Service-*

- *The contractor provided a specialist chemist who established a communication centre which was available for all Councils to contact during the campaign.*

The principal of the contracting company offered personal service and expertise that was found to be of immense value to participating Councils.

➔ *Pricing-*

- *A very competitive cost structure designed on a base price for supply of containers and delivery/distribution/collection of product per collection site, and a unit price for product disposal based on product type.*

➔ *Reputation-*

Highly reputable company, as were all the companies invited to quote.

➔ *Insurance-*

Risk insurance was extended by contractor in favour of Councils as owner/generator of waste.

➔ *Billing-*

The contractor invoiced individual Councils at the conclusion based on information provided by the Co-ordinating Council and site collection dockets.

Advertising Co-Ordination

Advertising and promotion of the campaign is essential to allow management of the product inflow, ensure awareness by the public, and promote safety for all participants. The NIRW taskforce initiated advertising to address these issues by:-


- ➔ *Developing and implementing a generic Regional Television campaign.*
- ➔ *Preparing generic media releases.*
- ➔ *Designing and distributing pro-forma information leaflets for use by participating Councils for promotion at a local level.*
- ➔ *Participating in radio talk back.*

Due to variable requirements of member Councils in the times that collection was to be available and the variations of cost structures adopted by some Councils, each Council needed to adopt localised advertising campaigns. Most participating Councils adopted the use of localised community newsletters and local paper advertising as a means of communicating the message of the service and emphasise the safety precautions that need to be adopted by the public.

Training

Quotations were obtained from three reputable companies to provide training of staff. Due to the size of the region two training centres were nominated and training of staff involved in the program was carried out at Inverell and Tamworth.

Site Requirements and Operational Conditions

Due to the variety in Council sizes, demographics and philosophy on user pays principles, a significant  variation in collection protocols were likely to occur. Many Councils agreed that free delivery of product to an upper limit would encourage high participation levels and address the core problem, whilst other Councils believed a user pays system was justified. Despite these philosophical differences the participating Councils contributed enthusiastically to the campaign.

Public Delivery Costs

Greater than 50% of the Councils had a system where an authenticated ratepayer could deliver up to 20 litres or 20 kilograms of product for free disposal. Other participating Councils adopted variations such as 10 litres or 10 kilograms free, or in some cases residents pay the actual disposal cost of the product, with Council meeting overhead costs.

Such variations did require specific local advertising, and some Councils are likely to admit that the user pays philosophy whilst financially sound, does not necessarily produce the desired result of having unwanted chemicals delivered into a managed environment.

Collection Times

For a variety of reasons Councils wished to operate collection sites for differing hours. All Councils agreed to the principle of operating over a single period for the purpose of generic advertising, training and budget management, however due to the variation in operation hours at given sites, individual Councils did undertake extensive local community advertising.

Site Requirements - Collection Centres

Councils considered what needed to be incorporated into any operational collection site for the purpose of public access, security and safety. Issues that were considered to be important included:-

- *Good all weather vehicular access for the public.*
- *Secure site (preferably manproof)*
- *Hardstand storage and collection area suitable for bunding.*
- *Reasonably remote from nearest residential premises.*

- *Availability of services such as water, electricity, telephone, and amenities/facilities.*
- *Provision for wet weather and/or shade.*

Due to the demand for high quality sites many NIRW Council's operated joint sites whilst some Councils operated several sites at depots within their Local Government areas to serve as many ratepayers as possible.

Results of Campaign

How many Communities/Councils to be served by Campaign?



The NIRW Group invited participation by all twenty (20) member Councils, covering an area of approximately 85,542 square kilometres. Nineteen (19) of the group Councils ultimately participated in the campaign.

Costs

Costs varied for individual Councils based on manning and site operation arrangements. The total cost for contractual services was approximately \$91,000 with a proportion of this cost being met by user pays.

A typical Council generating about 750 kg of mixed chemical product under a 20 litre free threshold (such as Parry Shire Council) was faced with a contractual cost of about \$5,000 for the campaign. It is important to note that this cost may vary depending on the type of product collected, for example, if you expected a large inflow of arsenic or organochlorines your cost may increase to meet actual disposal costs.

Wins for the Environment, Council and Community

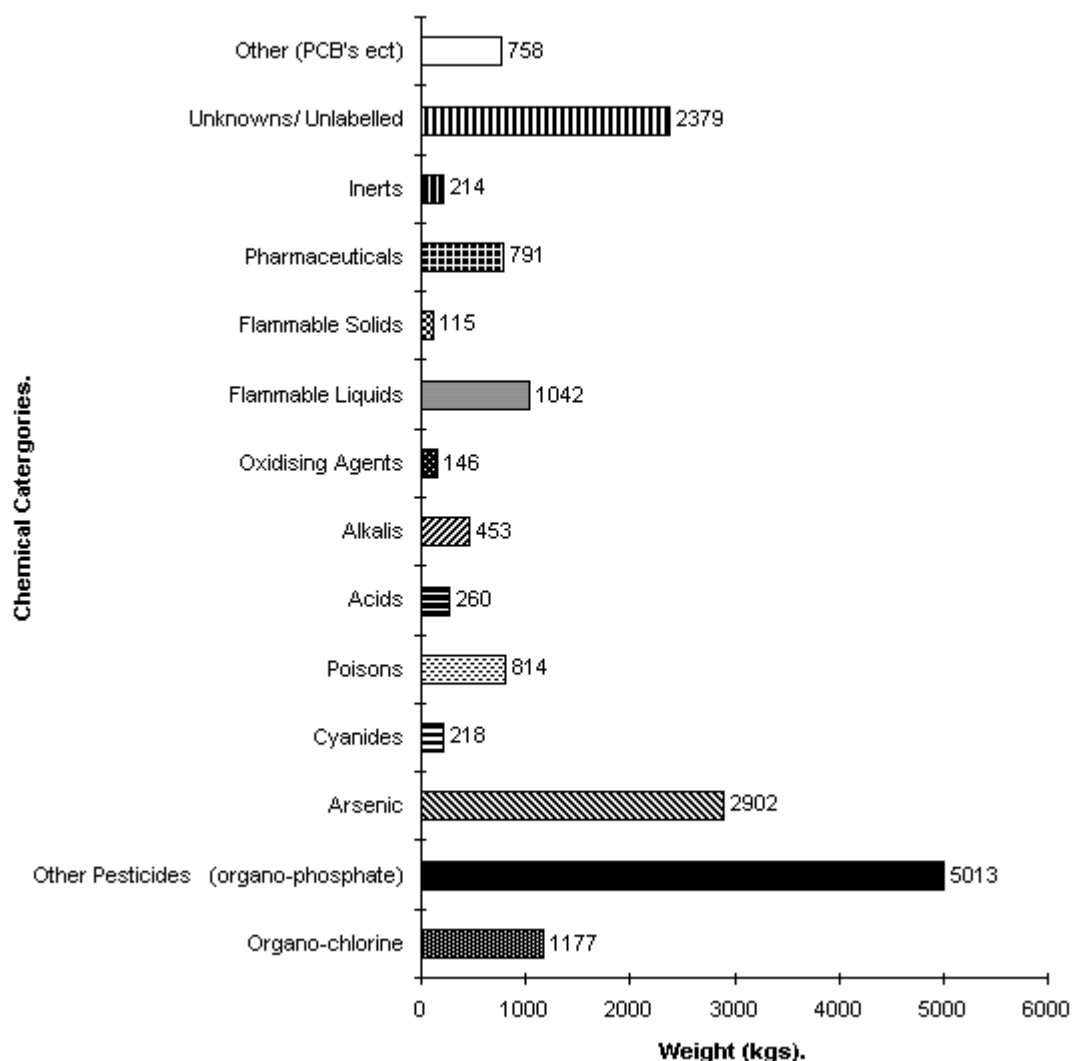
The campaign demonstrated what can be done when a group of committed and enthusiastic individuals set out to achieve community and environmental benefits. Despite the philosophical differences of many individual local political groups (Councils) the composite group of Councils when acting for a common aim were able to adopt a cost effective and successful campaign that was sufficiently flexible to meet individual needs, yet designed to achieve a common outcome. The general community were highly supportive of the campaign and the level of satisfaction expressed by all Councils, demonstrates what can be achieved at a local level with a little bit of co-operation and enthusiasm.

Product collected by participating Councils

The nineteen participating Councils collected an enormous variety of product. About 16.3 tonnes of product was collected during the campaign. The following graph illustrates the types and quantities of product collected.

Regional Chemical Collection

1st & 2nd May 1999



Lessons Learnt From the Campaign

There were many salutary lessons learnt by the group when conducting the campaign. The most important of these lessons relate to planning, communication and being prepared for contingencies, eg:

- Consult with all relevant authorities and particularly the Environment Protection Authority, WorkCover and local emergency services.
- Be aware of environmental treaties for disposal of waste and in particular the National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) that may effect disposal options.
- Communicate clearly and extensively with your local community.
- Initiate rigid safety and security protocols with your local council
- Cater for all weather conditions
- Train staff and provide essential support by way of access to technical expertise when conducting campaign.
- Most importantly, take NOTHING for granted. Expect the unexpected.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding all the difficulties of such an undertaking, all participating Councils readily agreed that the campaign was highly successful and provided what many considered to be an overdue and essential service to the local community.

The NIRW group intend conducting a further campaign in May of 2000. Further specific information can be obtained by contacting John Davis or Kellie Wilson at Parry Shire Council Telephone (02) 67662908, facsimile (02) 67668514 or E-mail parry@parry.nsw.gov.au.