

3.8 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for the Environment regarding actions taken following the death of a dog subsequent to the ingestion of phorate: [1(652)]

Sorry, Sir, I was just pondering other issues; excuse the delay. Further to an incident earlier this year in which a 10 year-old Japanese Spitz died after ingesting phorate at Les Creux Country Park, what further steps, if any, will the Minister take to ensure the possibility of such incidences recurring are minimised in the future?

Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

The incident this summer that caused the death of a dog as a result of it consuming a banned pesticide was, indeed, a very tragic one. My department and I place great importance on the safe sale, use and storage of pesticides and we investigated this case and searched the area where the dog was walked but did not find any sign of old containers or pesticides. We also checked historic pesticide records and stores in the area for signs of phorate, the pesticide that killed the dog, but again did not find anything. While we do not believe there is anything other than an extremely small ongoing risk to pets, we advise dog owners and walkers to remain vigilant and report any concerns they may have to my department. States Members may also be aware that the department's pesticide amnesty, which following the death of the dog we readvertised, has allowed members of the public to bring out of date and revoked pesticides into the department without fear of prosecution. I believe the current wide range of audits and enforcement activities we undertake to ensure that risks from pesticides are minimised to be adequate and appropriate. While this type of incident is very sad, it is fortunately also extremely rare.

3.8.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can the Minister confirm, if not now by circulating the information, as to what levels of the chemical phorate were in the dog's system? Has he ruled out that the case may have been malicious?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I will attempt to find out the level of phorate that was used in the poisoning. I cannot rule out or rule in anything particularly. I did do some research. Obviously, our States vet was heavily involved in this. The animal was tested twice to make sure and ascertain correctly that phorate was indeed the chemical that was used. This is a chemical which was banned in 2003. So it is still a mystery to my department as to quite how this dog happened unfortunately to be poisoned by it. It is a chemical when applied on ground and in the air it usually disperses within 2 to 3 weeks, so this case is still a mystery to us.

3.8.2 The Deputy of St. John:

When the press release came out from the department with regards to this, I was quite astonished that the department stated that they think there is no future threat of this phorate coming forward, so I questioned the department further. I need to ask the Minister whether he thinks the Pesticides (Jersey) Law 1991 is sufficient for the ability for his officers to investigate and whether there is sufficient resource to carry out the relevant roles.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

The current pesticides laws are quite onerous. We adopt a list from the U.K. which we accept in Jersey is the approved list, but we regularly remove chemicals from this when they are banned or the licence expires. I would quote the recent case where I took the pesticide linuron off the list. So we have very rigorous testing of the chemicals we use. We audit very heavily every chemical which enters the Island. We have continuous dialogue with the people who sell it. People who use it have to be certified to buy chemicals from authorised dealers and the

people who apply it have to be certified and use equipment which is calibrated for the purpose. I do not know what more we can do in this day and age, but I can only say to the Deputy back in 2003 we were not as stringent as we are now. I can only reaffirm that how this particular chemical - and again it was a mystery, which is why we tested for it twice - has even survived to this day in the Island is still a bit of a mystery.

3.8.3 The Deputy of St. John:

A supplementary: can I ask the Minister whether he thinks it appropriate that the department randomly inspects only 20 per cent of all pesticide stores annually and at that point removes out of date or revoked products and whether there is further work that the department could be doing to ensure that should this be some form of malicious intent they would be able to identify and investigate further?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

It is right to say that we only routinely look at 20 per cent of chemical stores on the Island, but I can say to the Deputy that if we have any inkling that something is not right we have obviously the ability to inspect spray records at a moment's notice. We have the ability to inspect spray canisters or containers at a moment's notice. Through the work of the Cleaner Water Group we are identifying areas. We are doing an awful lot more testing of watercourses. We are picking up chemicals that we may not have seen before and we go back and test. We have an excellent rapport with the industry but, of course, I have to say to the Deputy, if people want to hide things from us it is not a particularly difficult thing to do. Like anything, if farmers or anybody for that matter is determined to hide a chemical away somewhere, that may well be done. But we make every effort we can. We reduce the 20 per cent to save on officer time but I could only reiterate to the Deputy that if we have the slightest inkling that something is out of order we inspect records and we speak to farmers immediately.

3.8.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am obviously asking this question on behalf of a constituent but as there are many dog lovers in Jersey it is, I think, germane to many of us. It seems to me that a dog would not naturally seek to eat phorate or a similar substance under normal circumstances. That means that it was probably either eating food that had been contaminated with the product or perhaps eating an animal which had subsequently died after eating the product. Either way, it suggests that there may have been some malicious intent and, if that was the case, would the department liaise and continue to do work to make sure that people are not acting maliciously in such cases?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am reassured by the fact that a number of dogs get walked in this area every day. In fact, I walk my own dogs there and I know it is an area that is heavily used. The fact that no other dogs appear to have suffered any ill effects in walking in this area is some relief to me, but I can only say to the Deputy that I understand his sentiments. He does not need to go into any more depth. I will speak to the States Vet about this and see if any further action needs to be taken.