

# POISONED

## By the apple moth spray

By Jock Anderson, NZ Truth Weekly June 21, 2007

DEATH, mutilation and sickness plague a forgotten corner of Auckland that locals say was poisoned by painted apple moth spraying.

Anti-spray campaigner Donna Bird says that in the four years since aircraft sprayed west Aucklanders with the chemical insecticide Foray 48B, people living in the small area of Beach Haven, on Auckland's North Shore, have been ravaged by the toxic aftermath.

Key Beach Haven addresses outside the spray zone but which were sprayed – despite Government denials – included Lancaster Rd, Melba Rd, Paragon Ave, Crocombe Cres, Hellyers St, Gazelle Ave and other streets around Shepherds Park.

Bird (41) says she knows of people who have apparently died prematurely.

A friend had both legs amputated, a relative lost a baby within minutes of birth, numerous neighbours are sick and she - diagnosed with debilitating fibromyalgia - has tumours in her breasts and womb.

Other sprayed residents told Truth of a spate of miscarriages, pets dying, cancers, skin rashes, and lung, chest and eye problems.

People Truth spoke to believe these events are linked to the painted apple moth spraying.

Throughout residents say the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), which conducted the controversial aerial spraying programme, lied to them and blatantly denied Beach Haven was sprayed.

“Can I say all this sickness was caused by painted apple moth aerial spraying? No, I can't – no one is able to,” an angry Bird told Truth.

“But people began getting sick and dropping after the spraying was conducted in 2002 and 2003.”

Bird, who lived in Crocombe Cres, said she began to lose her memory, got pain in her joints and had heart palpitations.

When she drove her car her arms went numb and she confused left and right. She got eye problems and was becoming more tired, all of which she blames directly on the spraying.

She said a 50-year old friend's leg blew up "like a sieve" and was amputated. Attempts to save his other leg from clotting failed and it too was cut off.

John Mooney, of Gazelle Ave, says he had to wear a mask because he couldn't breathe.

"MAF denied it but the planes came right over and sprayed over the top of us ... we could see the planes go up the creek and could taste the stuff. It was terrible," he said.

"I never had chest troubles before. The spray killed all the bees, all the bees went. Butterflies were all lying dead on the ground.

"We didn't have any moths in Beach Haven but we still got sprayed."

Julie Light, of Hobsonville, where the planes flew from, says they were sprayed without being told in advance.

"We could have got out of it and got away but we didn't know," Light said.

"The Government didn't really tell us what was going on."

Alan Samuels, of Elcoat Ave, Henderson, who was involved setting up the later People's Inquiry to investigate the spraying campaign, says he would like to think it would have some positive effect for the future "in terms of people not having successive governments spraying them".

He says the Government never told people what was in the spray but they found out later the contents were carcinogenic.

Paul Davidson, of Melba St, who told us his wife contracted cancer after the spraying, says he and his wife have circulation problems they never had before spraying, waking up regularly with tingling fingers.

His daughters, who have mild asthma, still have irritated throats.

"I think it is highly likely there is a link between the spraying and my wife's cancer but from a medical point of view it's hard to pin down."

Davidson says he woke up to find an aircraft flying dropping spray over his house. He phoned MAF but was told his house was not in the spray zone.

“When the plane came past I could have thrown a rock and hit the pilot. There was spray all over my van, the house and plants.

“They should publicly admit face to face to everyone they made a mistake.”

Debbie Davidson, of Lancaster Rd, says her daughter, now 19, was covered in a rash and her eyes still swell shut.

“It’s left her with allergies and the eye swelling is a permanent problem but MAF says it is not from the spraying.”

“I want them to admit that people in the spray drift zone were affected but MAF and the Ministry of Health won’t accept it,” Davidson said.

Janine, who did not want her full name or address used, says she suffered serious breathing problems on the first day of spraying and watched as “everything that could fly splattered up against my ranch-sliders trying to get away from the spray”.

By July 2003 more than 3300 people had reported health problems associated with the spraying in west Auckland.

An Auckland University study of residents’ self-reported symptoms also found the number of people experiencing headaches rose by 13%, those with throat irritation nearly doubled and those with diarrhoea increased by 81%.

The researchers said they did not prove the symptoms were caused by the painted apple moth spray.

In February 2004 a group of public health specialists reported on their assessment of the potential health impact of the spraying programme for the Ministry of Health.

The experts from the Wellington School of Medicine and Health Sciences, the Auckland University School of Population Health and Environmental Science and Research recommended a series of steps the Government should take with future spraying.

Some recommendations called for better reassurances to exposed communities, for sprays to be reassessed by ERMA and longer terms studies of the effects of exposure.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry’s health service, Aer Aqua, would not meet the group.

More than four years later none of the recommendations appear to have been implemented and the report appears to have been binned.

Dr Simon Hales, a public health specialist with a key role in the assessment and who is said to have been ostracised because the Government didn't like the report, told Truth he would be interested in reading this story but preferred not to comment.

### **What the victims say**

Grant Philpott: "The future? I have leukaemia. I am going to die..."

Julie Light: "A plane came low and sprayed us...we would have got out if we had been told."

Paul Davidson: "I have lack of circulation and tingling fingers, my wife has cancer, but MAF denied spraying us."

John Mooney: "We could taste the stuff, it was terrible...it killed all the bees and butterflies were all lying dead on the ground."

Alan Samuels: "The government never told us what the full content of the spray was."

Debbie Davidson: "My daughter got covered in a rash and her eyes swelled up. The eye swelling is a permanent problem."

Janine (full name withheld): "I had two lots of cancer and even though I was ill I was never this ill."

Hana Blackmore: "Everyone seems to know someone who was sick or had a real problem."

Donna Bird: "I started to suffer incredible joint and muscle pain, I have tumours in my breasts and womb, but MAF says this has nothing to do with the spraying."

### **MAF threat creates Mafia**

IN a bizarre bully-boy tactic, Jim Anderton's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry – MAF – threatened Donna Bird with prosecution and a \$5000 fine for her unauthorised use of the word MAF.

In writing to Anderton and MAF, a frustrated Bird referred to herself as "Secretary for the dropping dead from MAF poison moth spray committee".

But on March 2 MAF heavyweight Jeremy Lambert – acting director of MAF communications, no less - wrote to Bird warning her that by “using the word MAF without authorisation” she may be committing offences under the Flags, Emblems and Names Protection Act 1981.

Lambert said he had not given approval for Bird or her committee to use the MAF word, and “in order to avoid further breaches of the act, MAF advises you to stop using the word ‘MAF’ as part of the name of your committee immediately”.

Attached to Lambert’s threat was a copy of Appendix A of the Flags, Emblems and Names Protection Act 1981, showing the word MAF was indeed a protected species, whose unauthorised use was punishable by a fine of up to \$5000.

An unrepentant Bird promptly wrote back, suggesting MAF should stick to its full name of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Bird says the full name of her committee is The Dropping Dead from Middle Aged Fellows Poison Moth Spray Committee, which she said was abbreviated to Dropping Dead from MAF Poison Moth Spray Committee because the full name was too cumbersome.

But on April 4 back came another letter from MAF’s Lambert, warning Bird a second time to stop using the word MAF.

Not to be outdone, she now also refers to her committee of supporters as Many Affected Friends in Aotearoa (Mafia).

## **People’s inquiry**

A PEOPLE’S Inquiry – believed to be a New Zealand first - wants no repeat of Auckland’s botched painted apple moth spraying.

Residents affected by the West Auckland spraying in 2002 and 2003 told their stories of the spray’s impact to a panel of national and international commissioners early in 2006.

The Inquiry report and its recommendations – expected to be highly critical of MAF’s handling of the spraying and the government’s official dismissal of many health concerns and effects – is expected to be made public in July.

An interim report in February 2003 slammed the inadequacy of the official health risk assessment and its inability to accurately predict the level, extent and seriousness of the adverse effects being experienced by the community.

The interim report also exposed the inability of the MAF health monitoring and support programme to adequately and actually support many of the people affected by the aerial spraying campaign.

Inquiry convenor Hana Blackmore told Truth a strong message from the Inquiry was that the government should listen to what the people said, take notice and never let such a spray fiasco happen again.

“When people began to get seriously ill we tried to stop the spraying, which eventually grew to take in an area of about 160,000 people,” says Blackmore. “But the government lost the plot and paid no attention.”

Blackmore says there was a clear connection between spraying and asthma and other health conditions, and people wanted a full inquiry.

“Everyone knew someone who was sick or had a real problem.”

She says there is still so much about the spraying that people don’t know and for which answers are still sought.

Blackmore says the People’s Inquiry report will have recommendations for a range of Government select committees, including health and agriculture.

She says the “overwhelming feeling” from the inquiry was that people did not want compensation – they wanted the Government to take serious notice of their concerns so there would never be another spray fiasco.

## **Leukemia victim wants day in court before death**

GRANT Philpott wants his day at the International Court of Justice before he dies of the leukemia he says the Government’s painted apple moth aerial spraying gave him.

The former Henderson High School technology teacher says that by denying the effects of Foray 48B – which he says is specifically not for use on unprotected people - the government has set the stage for poisoning people worldwide.

Philpott says the Government refuses to accept his injuries are a result of the insecticide spraying, the Accident Compensation Corporation rejected his claims and he has no choice but to take his fight to the ICJ.

“Hopefully I can get people to ask questions about ‘clean green’ New Zealand,” an understandably bitter Philpott told Truth.

When aerial spraying began in 2002, Philpott, a solo dad with a teenage daughter, was living and working in the

West Auckland spray zone.

“In 2003 I started working in Auckland and riding my motorcycle through the spray to get to work.

“I was working as a secondary level technology teacher. At the start of the 2003 school year I noticed I was having difficulties with vertigo attacks and lack of physical strength.

“I then started having anxiety attacks to the point I couldn’t mark my students work as this would set off the attacks.

“By May 2003 I was having anxiety attacks so bad I was put off work with stress,” he said.

“A blood test showed I had just got chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) but no-one noticed.”

As his health steadily got worse Philpott could not return to work.

“In early 2004 I developed bleeding blisters in my nose the day after a spraying of Foray 48B. I thought it was a coincidence but it happened again after the next spraying.”

Philpott went to AerAqua – the Government’s health service for spray victims – but says it tried to fob him off before finally telling him he may have reacted to acids in the spray.

He said his condition continued to decline to the point he could barely get up the steps of his house because of lack of strength and vertigo.

“My eyesight was failing and my hair was falling out. I was also developing arthritis.”

Philpott said that by August 2005 he was nearly dead, from multiple failures within his endocrine system – failures he says can be directly related to benzoic acid in Foray 48B.

The failures included his pituitary, thyroid and prostate glands.

He says the father of a friend died during the insecticide spraying of the same endocrine failure.

Now working a couple of hours late at night arranging tables and chairs for conferences, Philpott says the lifting helps him regain his strength.

Fighting his leukemia with different and more effective drugs, Philpott recently made submissions against the use of the controversial 1080 poison to Environmental Risk Management Authority hearings.

The future?

“I’m going to die,” Philpott told Truth. “The medical profession has not caught up with the power of the herbicide and pesticide makers and the governments that use these weapons.”