

## Brief History of the People's Inquiry

A Brief History of the People's Inquiry From 1996 to mid 2004 the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) conducted three major multi-million dollar eradication campaigns against incursions of alien moths - the white spotted tussock moth, the painted apple moth and the asian gypsy moth.

All these campaigns involved intensive aerial spraying of pesticide over heavily populated urban areas. The extent and duration of all three eradication programmes were in excess of any urban aerial spraying programme anywhere in the world. West Auckland experienced 48 discrete aerial spray events over 70 days. These occurred during school and working hours over a period of 29 months. Some residents were not only exposed to the continuous spray programme but faced huge social, family and economic disruptions as well when their medical conditions necessitated evacuation out of the area during spray operations. The insecticide used was Foray 48B, a formulation containing the active ingredient *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki*, a bacterium, and a number of adjuvant chemicals. Because this insecticide is based on a biological organism it was widely assumed to be safe for people. As a result of this assumption monitoring of adverse health effects had been grossly inadequate, despite repeated requests for proper surveillance. The initial Health Risk Assessment (HRA) for the 1996-97 campaign, upon which all subsequent HRAs were based, was notably deficient. Deficiencies included failure to fully characterise the extent of exposure and failure to characterise the risks associated with adjuvant chemicals - including the effects of mixtures of chemicals. Additionally our own assessment of some of the adjuvants, such as propylene glycol, led us to conclude that significant health effects should have been expected, and that these adjuvants may account for some of the effects reported by members of the community.

Because the initial Health Risk Assessment concluded that health effects would be 'negligible' or 'acceptable', when members of the community complained of ill health, generally the Ministry discounted any link with the spray, or determined the effects to be acceptable.

During the most prolonged and intensive of the campaigns, that of the spraying of West Auckland for the painted apple moth from January 2002 to May 2004, over 400 people reported to a community health research project that they had symptoms of ill health resulting from the spray. Several university-based studies also identified adverse health effects resulting from the spray. In spite of these studies, and the evidence accumulated by the community, all requests for an official inquiry or review into the impacts and effects of the spraying programmes were denied. It was decided the only avenue left was for the community to hold its own Inquiry.