Methyl Bromide
FAQS – August 2020

BAY OF PLENTY REGIONAL COUNCIL TOI MOANA

What is methyl bromide?

Methyl bromide is a colourless, odourless, toxic, non-flammable gas.

What is it used for?

Methyl bromide is used as a fumigant to kill unwanted pests associated with the movement of goods internationally. In New Zealand, this enables our economy to benefit from log exports to India and China, who require fumigation. It is an effective biosecurity tool against pests coming into our country on imported items too. In the Bay of Plenty, methyl bromide is used primarily for quarantine or pre-shipment applications and a resource consent is held by the fumigator.

Is the gas harmful and what is being done to reduce the risks?

All fumigants have the potential to be harmful if they are not used in accordance with the required safeguards. To protect people's health, methyl bromide is used in a controlled process in accordance with Health and Safety at Work legislative fumigation requirements. Learn more about this here. Fumigations must also comply with Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) standards, including a mandatory minimum buffer zone. To mitigate effects, the EPA will also require the recapture or destruction of methyl bromide emissions at the end of all fumigation from April 2021. The EPA's reassessment of methyl bromide will be held via remote access in August 2020 and this will re-examine the recapture deadline. The dates and times for the hearings can be found here. Regional Council is responsible for ensuring any methyl bromide consent holder complies with their consent conditions.

Isn't methyl bromide banned overseas?

Many of the countries which have banned methyl bromide also do not export logs. New Zealand has signed the Montreal Protocol which reflects a commitment to reduce the use of ozone depleting substances, such as methyl bromide. More information is available here.

Why is fumigation still carried out at the Port of Tauranga?

Some of our main overseas markets for logs require that we fumigate. Methyl bromide log fumigation is generally done under tarpaulins onsite at the Port for 12-24 hours prior to the logs being loaded onto a ship. This ensures any pests on the logs are eradicated. Occasionally logs are fumigated with methyl bromide in a ship's holds, which is then released to the atmosphere prior to sailing.

What are the alternatives to methyl bromide?

Alternatives include EDN (ethanedinitrile) which has no ozone layer impact. However, this is not yet approved for use in New Zealand. There is also phosphine, generally used during transit, but this takes at least 10 days to fumigate and is not accepted by India's log importing policies.

How much of the gas is recaptured and how much is just released into the atmosphere?

About 220 tonnes of methyl bromide are used at the Port of Tauranga every year. Much of this is discharged to air when the fumigation process is complete, however recapture is being progressively introduced. Currently 100% of containers and 75% of all log fumigations at the Port of Tauranga must have recapture applied.

For more information

Visit the Environmental Protection Authority website or Ministry for Primary Industries website for details on the methyl bromide deadline and regulations.