

Inch Street lobbyists heard outcome of the EPA inquiry

A meeting between Lithgow Council and a lobby group of Inch Street residents on Thursday outlined the results of an inspection of industrial premises in that street following what proved to be a 'false alarm' mustard gas scare late last year.

The residents were evacuated under emergency procedures after it was suspected that residual mustard gas had escaped from old wartime bomb casings at the Cooke's Metals premises.

The shells had been taken to the site for recycling after being recovered during a decontamination program at the Marrangaroo Army Camp.

A Defence Department report released earlier this month revealed the suspect substance was actually benzene, a chemical previously found in petrol.

The scare, however, was the trigger for extensive representations to Council by Inch Street residents demanding the relocation of industrial activities that have existed there for years.

Council promised full consultation with residents to discuss the investigation by the EPA and this meeting took place yesterday.

The meeting was told that the EPA inspection was able to be undertaken with the EPA and Council's

Environmental Health Officer at short notice on February 12.

Key findings from the inspection included:

* It is confirmed that while Cooke's Metal Industries is not currently licensed under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997, the EPA remains the Appropriate Regulatory Authority (ARA) for the site.

* The EPA will write to Cookes Metal regarding the outcome of the inspection as well as serving a notice on the business proprietor under Section 193 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 to provide further information and-or records in relation to a number of aspects of the operations at the premises inspection.

* The EPA will review the information provided in response to the Section 193 notice and determine what further action may be necessary.

* Council will provide the EPA with copies of correspondence it has received from residents so it may determine if any of the issues raised therein are matters that it may pursue in its role as ARA.

* Basically, any issues such as loading and unloading on the street are matters outside of the control of the ARA.

Further investigation is taking place in respect of this issue.

* To assist Council the EPA will include in its 193 notice a requirement to provide "all written evidence-documentation as to what date the operations first commenced at the site".

While there appears to be very little doubt, this will be helpful to Council in putting any question of Existing Use Rights for the site beyond any argument.

Council's Regional Services Manager Andrew Muir said in summary that issues relating to the site and any environmental impacts from the site are matters for the EPA.

He said the EPA officers are aware of the various concerns raised by the community but will only be able to address these concerns, such as noise, within its powers.

"Given there is no development consent over the land which would include conditions relating to parking and unloading, Council will have to further investigate issues of trucks parking and unloading on the street," he said.

At recent Council meetings the possibility of a public meeting has been raised.

The EPA have been contacted regarding the possibility of facilitating a meeting and are considering this request.