

FACT SHEET

SHEEP-DIPS

Sheep dipping started in New Zealand in the early 1800s and was required by law. Well over 50,000 sheep-dip sites are present in New Zealand.

Most sheep farms had their own dip. Due to collapse or changes in size often more than one dip site is present. Mobile spray dips were used in the second half of the 20th century.

Dips are found close to woolsheds, yards, areas where water is available and road or rail loading facilities. The last had often a communal dip where tens of millions of sheep could be dipped in the life of the dip.

These sheep-dip sites often hold more arsenic than is found on timber treatment yards. They are located in centre of towns, often near the current stock yards, or along railway lines. On average every 30 – 50 km of railway would have had a sheep loading and dipping facility.



The soil contamination is severe close to the dip, the drip pad and mixing tanks, to the point that incidences of stock death occur still every year. Exposure to the contaminants found even up to 200 meters from the dip itself can cause chronic diseases and will affect health and well being of people and children living on such sites.

Marking out the contaminated area is a first step in managing the risks associated with sheep-dips.

An experienced person can do this in one day. Some samples will need analysis in a laboratory.

Fencing off the relevant areas is the simplest way to reduce the risk.

Care is required not to underestimate the spreading of the contamination. Sheep were often muddy and large

quantities of sludge with high concentration of chemicals were often spread around the dip to dry. Sometimes they were spread along fence lines, or buried in the local dam. Where ever they are their position needs to be identified for the fencing off to be effective.

Please Note: If you have any doubt about the presence of a dip site, own a wool or shearing shed, use the free question service on this website to get more information specific to your situation.

Main contaminants (found at 100 – 50% of original concentration mg/kg)	Arsenic	Dieldrin	DDT-Lindane
	Period used	1840 – 1980	1955-1961
NZ background level	4- 10	0.0001	0.00001
Lifestyle /residential guideline level	30	2.7	8.4
Levels near dips	>10,000 >1000	>500	
Levels in yards	50 – 500	7 – 200	10 – 300
Levels in 1 st paddock	20 – 300	3 – 100	5 – 150
(levels found in actual dips sites surveyed (total dip sites surveyed: 50)			