

**Submission
No 5**

INQUIRY INTO KOORAGANG ISLAND ORICA CHEMICAL LEAK

Name: Stockton Public School

Date received: 3/11/2011

Stockton Public School

Quality education for life in a safe, caring environment.



NSW Department of Education and Communities
10 Clyde Street Stockton NSW 2295

TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE KOORAGANG ISLAND ORICA LEAK

Inquiry into the Orica Chemical Leak

Submission: Jointly: Stockton Public School Staff with Daniella Jones (Representative of Stockton Public School, Staff Member, Resident of Stockton, and Member of the Kooragang Reference Group, Orica)

Contacts: Daniella Jones, Stockton Public School, Tracey Frazer, Principal, Stockton Public School

1. General

We at Stockton Public School jointly submit this document in response to the chemical release of Hexavalent Chromium on Kooragang Island on the 8th August 2011.

We have never to this day been officially informed or received formal notification alerting our school of the release of this chemical into our community by Orica.

No official call was made to our school or Principal on the eve of the leak or the following morning. Alternatively we had to seek information ourselves later in the week after a staff member who is a member of The Kooragang Reference Group was notified on Wednesday evening outside school hours.

When our office became aware of the situation and a call was put in to Orica we could not speak to anyone who would give us any information. It wasn't until Friday morning that a representative of that committee on staff was able to obtain any information. We relied upon media for this information.

We were then directed to the website of NSW Health about the health risks, and published this in our newsletter that week. Orica on that day, Friday 12th August supplied our school with 210 notices for students, in our school to go home with them, on Friday 12th. It is our opinion, that this was all too late, four days after the leak. It was not the responsibility of the representative to inform the 5000 or more community members of the school of the leak, 2 days later either.

Therefore inadequately we became aware of the leak through;

- a) Reference committee member being informed over the telephone after hours two days later
- b) Via the media

2. Concerns

We believe that geographic knowledge of the spread of the leak was known to Orica and yet they failed to inform us. We would like to emphasise, that we have never been notified as a school about the leak or have since, nor were we informed at the time whether we were in the zone of the leak, or not in the zone of the leak.

The potential health and other risk and impacts onto our school site and community were not adequately reported or addressed.

No emergency response was followed. The school should have been informed and notified that evening, or on Tuesday morning the 9th, via the Principal through emergency contacts.

Impacts and potential safety of our children's health that we have a duty of care for, was not initialised, and because of inadequate reporting and non-notification to the school or the DEC, we could not safeguard against potential dangers. It is our opinion that the reporting of this issue was very poor.

The environmental impact to our school, its grounds, its buildings, staff and children was potentially harmful.

Due to a lack of transparency we could not implement a plan, an emergency response, a lock down or safeguard the following impacts to our school. Elements of our school environment that could have been harmed include;

1. Staff and children
2. Medical conditions of staff and students who may have been affected by the leak, eg asthmatics
3. Air Quality
4. Buildings
5. Sand Pits
6. The grounds and surrounds of the school
7. Vegetable garden

No communication was given to us so therefore we could not take precautions and implement duty of care for our 270 students and staff.

The impact of our childrens' health and that of the staff attending the school on subsequent days after the leak could not be guarded against because of a lack of notification of the leak, poor reporting and reliance on media.

Therefore the actions and timing of Orica reporting the leak to us could have been potentially harmful to environment, population and school site. The potential seriousness and devastating consequences for us, was and has always remained unknown and our position as duty of care been compromised, as we are ill informed.

We have worked with Orica and its officers several years ago to update and improve our management of such disasters. In our evacuation plan it states that 000 will be called in the case of a leak or potential explosion on the site and that the school would be notified through local and state emergency procedures. This did not occur.

This leaves questions and procedural matters unanswered for us today in our school. We did not have the opportunity to implement a lockdown the following day or inform our school community of events.

We believe the government did not take responsibility for the people of Stockton, because they did not inform the community for 54 hours. This in our opinion is negligent and we believe the ministers concerned did not take responsibility for their own portfolios.

The leak was unreported to us by the EPA, the government or Orica and this gave us little opportunity to implement a safe response for attending students at our school in or out of the zone in the following days after the leak.

Suggestions and Future Management

It is in our opinion that the following should be implemented without delay In the case of future emergencies;

1. 000 called and the school duly notified
2. A siren alerting the community to the potential emergency from the Orica site and other local sites where chemicals are processed on Kooragang Island
3. That the school is in a part of an emergency plan approved by the State Government that follows procedure for emergency bodies to mandatorily inform the local community, the school and the department of Education and Training(DEC)
4. A fire station should be erected on Kooragang Island

5. A plan to evacuate children and staff off Stockton on buses needs to be developed in case of future emergencies if necessary
6. Continual monitoring and testing of air quality
7. Emergency response kits made available at the school for use during chemical lock downs including buckets with lids, (for toileting), masks and water bottles. These should be given to us by industry.

In conclusion we would like to point out that it is not our job to inform the community of such emergencies and that the responsibility must remain with the businesses and industries who work so close to our community. They must work side by side with their government counterparts to reassure and gain the confidence back from the community.

We as a staff are concerned with future developments of Kooragang Island, Eastern Star Gas, and proposals of Incitec Pivotal, who also wish to make ammonia on their site.

If this is the response we can expect from these industries and the government to act in a way that is irresponsible and negligent, then we do not hope for a very positive outcome if a disaster of any magnitude were to occur.

Thank you for allowing us to make a submission to this inquiry

The Staff of Stockton Public School

Daniella Jones, Teacher

Member Kooragang Reference Group

Tracey Frazer, Principal

