

CHEMICALS LINK TO PROSTATE CANCER



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THERE is a potential linkage between prostate cancer and the use of agricultural chemicals according to

a men's health speaker at the National Centre for Farmers Health conference held in Hamilton.

Men's health educator and prostate case manager with Western District Health Service Stu Willder conducted an extensive literature review of 220 published articles relating to the use of agricultural chemicals and cancer development.

Mr Willder said the question of a potential linkage between prostate cancer and the use of agricultural chemicals had been surprisingly well researched with many clinical findings highlighting reasons for concern.

"What really shocked me in all the literature is there is definitely supportive evidence that there are obviously some

carcinogenic properties that can come out of using sprays including pesticides, insecticides, herbicides and organo-phosphates.

"Understanding the clinical link to the human body gives rise to the question of a link between repeated exposure to these agents and the development of prostate cancer.

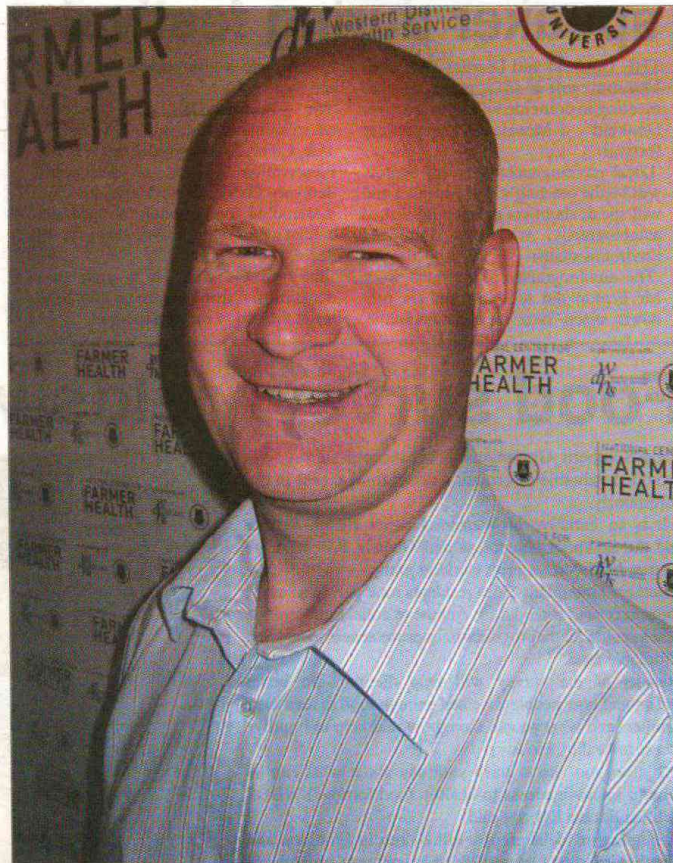
"The way chemicals work on insects and pests is the key to understand how some cancers and other health conditions develop in humans with repeated and continuous exposure," he said.

Agriculture is becoming increasingly dependent on chemicals to minimise the impacts of pests and weeds to maintain high levels of production. According to Mr Willder one of the problems with the studies was the huge number of chemical formulations available for agricultural use (there are over 8000 formulations currently in use in Australia) and the fact that farmers continually used different or newer chemicals as they became available.

"I think the big problem with the studies is they are so limited because we change our chemical focus so quickly, sprays and chemicals come into the market place so rapidly and they're gone and we don't really have enough time to assess what it is actually doing to human health.

"Many of the chemicals are assessed using rodents and do cause cancer at high doses but we don't do a great deal in working out what the impact is on farmers and their families health," he said.

Research in Australia



MEN'S health educator and prostate case manager with Western District Health Service Stu Willder believes there is a potential linkage between prostate cancer and the use of agricultural chemicals.

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reveals about 3300 men die from prostate cancer every with one in nine males experiencing prostate cancer over their lifespan. In addition to this Australian research reveals that for every 100 men who die of prostate cancer in metropolitan Australia, 121 men will die in rural Australia.

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Chemicals link

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Many older farmers would have used agricultural chemicals without personal protection equipment (PPE) such as overalls, gloves and facemasks and will have been exposed to chemicals and the effects of this may not be seen for many years. Mr Willder believes more rigorous research is required and greater focus on PPE when using chemicals on farms or in backyards.

"Once you have smelt it you have already got it into the system and the scary part is it is not today it is going to be a worry, it could be 10, 20, 30 years and that's where we are at the moment. We use these chemicals for economic, financial and sustainability of our agricultural systems and these reasons are valid, yet we fail to

show the health impacts of these chemicals with the same interest.

"I am not against the use of sprays or chemicals in agriculture, but I am certainly wary that in the future we are going to reflect on many of the chemicals we use now and see linkages to diseases such as prostate cancer, non Hodgkin's lymphoma and leukaemia. The past use of DDT and 2,4,5D have significant health effects and when originally used they were considered safe and effective.

"I think definitely more investigation is required, more rigour in the research and I believe we need to release our sprays after we know what they really do (to humans). Agriculture needs to use chemicals but we need to protect the health of our farming men and families," he said.