



BEN Walkenhorst of Tabor has made sure his tractor filter is working correctly, to avoid the inhalation of toxic fumes.

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Farmers warned to beware air quality in tractor cabins

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SOUTH-WEST farmers could be unknowingly at risk of inhaling toxic fumes from tractor cabins, according to the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH).

NCFH Agrisafe clinician, Rachel Verschuren said through discussions and meetings with farmers in Hamilton as part of the NCFH Agrisafe clinic, staff discovered many farmers could be misreading their tractor filters.

Tractor cabins are fitted with chemical filters to protect against chemical sprays, organic dust/gas and pollutants.

"We offer occupational health and safety for farmers, that includes a number of things, part of that is we assess their farming equipment," she said.

"We look at respiratory equipment, hearing protection, masks and of course built into that we're interested to see what they're doing with their tractors.

"We discovered that chemical filters in tractors

is becoming a bit of a problem."

Ms Verschuren said some filters have an indicator cell that show farmers coloured beads in filters.

She said others did not and need to be changed after a set number of service hours or a given period of time.

She said the beads are made from activated alumina, which is potassium permanganate impregnated.

"This means they change colour from purple to brown to cream as the carbon in the filter becomes saturated with toxic matter," she said.

"When the beads turn cream they are due to be either reconditioned or replaced.

"But what we are discovering many farmers do not realise is after turning cream, the beads then return to a brownish-black colour if the tractor is not used for a while.

"Which means farmers can incorrectly assume the filter is still active."

Ms Verschuren said inhaling different chemicals could create a range of different

health risks depending which chemicals are being used.

"It can be unknown how bad it could be. Inhaling these chemicals on a frequent basis is obviously not going to be good for you," she said.

"The other concern is, farmers can sit in their tractor and spray for a number of hours so if your inhaling for all that time that's not good.

"A lot of people assume because they're sitting in a cabin that they're safe, but that's not the case."

Ms Verschuren said filters should be changed or at least recharged after 400 hours of use, according to the due date, if the indicator beads have turned cream or if there is any concern regarding the performance of the filter.

She said there were three options when changing the filter, farmers could replace it themselves or have the filter reconditioned or they could send the filter away to be reconditioned.