

Tractor cabin health warning

By PETER HEMPHILL

FARMERS may be putting their health at risk by misreading or failing to renew chemical filters in tractor cabins.

The filters are designed to protect farmers against chemical sprays, dust and other pollutants.

They generally came in two types: with and without indicator beads.

But according to the National Centre for Farmer Health in Hamilton, the use of the filters is not well understood by farmers.

The centre's AgriSafe clinician, Rachel Verschuren, said filters with indicator cells had beads that changed colour as they became saturated with toxic matter.

Clean filters were purple to brown when new but changed to a cream colour as they filtered out pollutants.

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

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

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

Ms Verschuren said if the filter beads did not change colour, the farmers should change or recondition the filters according to their inspection date or after about 400 hours of tractor use — whichever came first.

She said that meant they needed to keep a log book detailing each time the filter was changed or recharged.

Its lifetime could be extended by removing and storing it in a sealed, airtight bag when not in use and reinstalled when the tractor was running again.

Ms Verschuren said reconditioning an existing filter was about half the price of a new one.

She said if farmers were to recharge an existing filter, they should make sure they were wearing protective clothing, a face mask and gloves.