

Hidden crisis in tractor cabins

Croppers can unwittingly gamble with their health and with paddock preparation and seeding underway the gamble has just increased.

A major risk is misreading the chemical filters fitted to tractor cabs to protect against chemical sprays, organic dust/gas and pollutants.

National Centre for Farmer Health, AgriSafe clinician Rachel Verschuren says indicator beads in filters are not fully understood by some farmers.

Rachel says some filters have an indicator cell that show farmers coloured beads in filters. Others do not and need to be changed after a set number of service hours or a given period of time. It is important that farmers and agricultural workers know which type they are working with.

She says 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,” Rachel says.

“When the beads turn cream they are due to be either reconditioned or replaced,” she says.

“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.” Or some farmers are not aware that after a period of time they should change their filters.

The NCFH AgriSafe clinic has been busy running occupational agricultural health assessments in the run-up to seeding. The founding centre is based at Western District Health Service, Hamilton.

A key focus is to assess the personal protective equipment used by farmers.

Rachel says AgriSafe clinic staff has been concerned by confusion amongst farmers about the safety of their tractors “at this critical time”.

She says it is possible for the coloured beads to slightly stain the plastic inside the indicator cell, making it difficult to correctly view colour.

“This highlights manufacturer recommendations for daily cleaning and checking of the chemical filter when in use in particular in dusty times.” Rachel adds.

Filters should be changed, or at least recharged as follows,” she says.

- After 400 hours of use (which means a usage log book must be kept).
- According to the inspection due date on your filter.
- If the indicator beads have turned cream.
- If there is any concern regarding the performance of the filter.

“People using chemical filters in tractors should also be aware if the filter is moisture contaminated it will become inactive, and must be replaced.

“Protective clothing, gloves and an appropriate face mask must also be worn if you are reconditioning the filter yourself.”

“To extend the filter’s life it should be removed and stored in a sealed, airtight bag when not in use. The original dust filter should then be reinstalled.”

Detailed advice is available from Ultrasafe’s Mark Size on 1800 305 564 or at info@ultrasafe.com.au

Further information is also available from NCFH.

Appointments can also be made for comprehensive health checks by contacting Rachel or Elizabeth at NCFH on 03 5551 8584.

Further details are available from Cate Mercer - Grant 55518533.