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Ms Linda Omar  
Committee Clerk  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs Committee  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Ms Omar

As Medical Director of the Western Australian Poisons Information Centre (WAPIC) I have been invited to provide a written submission on matters relating to the inquiry into Cockburn Cement Ltd, Munster.

The WAPIC provides advice to the public, health professionals and other agencies relating to accidental or intentional exposure to potentially toxic agents. This includes pharmaceuticals, chemicals and environmental exposures such as poisonous animals. Medical advice is provided by a number of Clinical Toxicologists, whose area of expertise involves formulating a risk assessment for the particular exposure and advising on the medical management of affected persons, generally in a hospital environment.

As far as I am aware the WAPIC has not had to provide advice regarding symptomatic members of the public who have been exposed to particulate matter or odours from Cockburn Cement Ltd. Certainly the medical consultants have not been involved in assessment or treatment of any symptomatic persons, so cannot provide informed comment based on personal experience.

In general terms the likely short-term impact of dust or fumes from an industrial site involved with cement production would be to manifest as possible respiratory, dermatological or ophthalmological effects (lung, skin, eyes). A recent review document released by the United Kingdom Health and Safety Executive (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/web/portlandcement.pdf>) has summarised international literature on the health effects of exposure to Portland Cement Dust. The scientific information is mostly related to occupational exposures in workers in close proximity to high levels of dust, and there are measurable deleterious effects on respiratory function in a number of studies of varying scientific quality.

However, the medical consultants to the WAPIC are not experienced in the assessment of industrial contaminants especially with respect to environmental concentrations and dose-exposure calculations – nor are they familiar with the exact chemical composition of environmental discharges from Cockburn Cement Ltd. This would be more the area of expertise of an Environmental Toxicologist or Occupational Physician. Any respiratory effects potentially attributable to industrial contamination in individuals would require evaluation by a Respiratory Physician to consider a causal relationship.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry regarding this matter.

Yours sincerely

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