

Sustaining the Pacific environment

Recognised as the first of its kind in the world, this project has successfully removed a major potential threat to the health and livelihoods of over two million people in twelve Pacific countries.

Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) are long lasting toxic organic compounds that were used in agricultural pesticides and herbicides and major electrical equipment coolant oils. The compounds are also found in DDT which was used for air-borne control of malaria-bearing mosquitoes.

POPs have the capacity to accumulate in the body fat of humans and animals and can be passed to younger generations during pregnancy and through breast-feeding. Exposure to POPs can result in nervous system damage with impacts on learning and intelligence, liver damage, some cancers and interference with hormone functions. Since the banning of their use, large quantities of unused POPs have been stored throughout the Pacific, generally in insecure and unsafe conditions. This created the potential for serious adverse impacts on human and animal health, and on the local environment - threatening local agriculture, fishery and tourism industries. Until recently, local people had little knowledge of the dangerous nature of the chemicals stored in their communities.

This regional project involved the collection and destruction of all POPs and other intractable chemicals in twelve of the member states of the South Pacific Regional Environmental Program. This project was implemented under international agreements for trans-boundary movement of waste. Leading a team including specialist waste management contractors (Hatlar Environmental) and logistics and shipping specialists (HK Logistics), 140,000 kg of waste chemicals were identified, repackaged and transported to Australia for safe destruction using specialised non-incineration processes. This has removed a major potential threat to the health and livelihoods of some two million people in the South Pacific.

*International Development Assistance Group
GHD Melbourne*

Project: Persistent Organic Pollutants in Pacific Island Countries Phase II
Client: AusAID
Duration: April 2003 - December 2008
Location: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu