

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
BY DEPUTY K.C. LEWIS OF ST. SAVIOUR**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 6th JUNE 2006

Question

The Minister has recently stated that there is no evidence of a connection between the La Collette composting site and the health of people living and working in the Havre des Pas area. Will the Minister undertake an investigation to ascertain whether there is any evidence of increased incidence of illness in the Havre des Pas area and, if so, the cause?

Answer

The Deputy is correct in that I have stated that there is no connection between the La Collette composting site and the health of the people living and working in the Havre des Pas area. My statement is based on the unequivocal advice of professional officers who include the Medical Officer of Health and the Head of the Health Protection Unit amongst others.

The Health Protection Unit has undertaken a comprehensive investigation in an attempt to seek evidence; showing an increase in illness in residents around composting sites; and an increase in illness and morbidity amongst the residents of Havre des Pas as a result of the relocation and continued operation of the composting facility at La Collette. The Health Protection Unit takes this matter very seriously and has investigated every complaint from residents that have been brought to its attention. However, the Health Protection Unit has failed to find any such causality. I fully appreciate the fact that this is not what local residents wish to hear. I accept fully that some residents fervently believe that there is such causality. But the plain fact is that there is no science, no evidence, to support those beliefs.

If there was to be any negative health effect, (any causality between illness of local residents and the composter), then this would likely to take the form of respiratory illness or disease. The Island's chest physician, an eminent and highly respected consultant, has confirmed that there is no evidence which would suggest increased levels of such disease amongst residents.

The problem that we have is that if there were such illness and disease, and I repeat again that there is no evidence of this, it would be impossible to differentiate the source of such illness and disease because of the wide and diverse emissions from "industrial activities" which take place in the La Collette area. These include of course the Fuel Farm, the Jersey Gas site, the Power Station (which includes the chimney, the stand-by power plant and the oil stores) and incinerator ash dumping. These activities together with the associated heavy traffic movement and the significant local car traffic combine to create low "background" levels of pollutants. Air quality testing in St. Helier undertaken by the Health Protection Unit has demonstrated grounding of the Power Station plume raising pollutant levels in certain climatic conditions.

In this context, no purpose could possibly be served by "an investigation". Many investigations have taken place and to the highest standards and the results are clear. If the evidence, the science, is not believed then there is very little more to be said. I am sorry that I have to put this in such clear terms.

The problem for the local residents concerns unpleasant odours. No one has denied that there are odours emanating from the general area of La Collette. Some studies have determined that these are caused by the composting process, although the number of such incidents have reduced by the use of better composting techniques; other odours relate to the presence of decomposing seaweed at the sea shore.

I have great sympathy for the feelings and beliefs of local residents. The way to resolve their concerns once and for all is to implement the Waste Strategy of which I am a great supporter. We should all get on with this task in the interests of both Havre des Pas and Bellozanne residents.

As a footnote, I might add that, in January 2006, the Head of the Health Protection Team met with local residents and with Deputy Paul le Claire of St. Helier in order that they might discuss the latter's concerns. At that meeting, a number of polluting incidents were reported which the Team had been hitherto unaware of. The Team is still waiting for information on these polluting incidents in order that they can be investigated.