ment has had to become more cost effective and there has been a switch from broadcast application to more spot or line application of herbicides. Newer chemicals, with very effective adjuvants developed in New Zealand for our specific problems, have reduced the range of products and rates required for good weed control. This is one instance where our more liberal registration laws have been to our advantage and allowed rapid introduction of these newer products and technologies.

Three Avenues

As forestry still has the conspicuously highest use rates for herbicides, it can expect further criticisms and pressures to reduce them. There are three avenues that can be followed to overcome these criticisms.

The first is to inform and educate the public of the reasons for chemical use and the benefits and risks which may result. Good examples of such strategies will be found in the US and Forestry Canada programmes, and some chemical companies such as Monsanto NZ who produce very informative literature and host visits by overseas experts. A disastrous home example was the AGCARM “There’s a greenie in your gumboot” type literature which was totally confrontational.

But you can’t inform others or plead your innocence if your staff don’t know what or why they are using specific chemicals. Aerial application is still essential at times, but what do the public know of the safety and risk assessments you have made? More promotion and explanation of present land management methods are needed. To achieve that, much better training of staff at all levels is essential. This is probably the single most cost-effective option possible at present. So what are the forest owners doing about it? What is their annual budget? How many of their staff have been trained to specific levels? Do you know? I don’t!

The long-term solution to reduced chemical use is either in more effective and efficient application or the use of more “natural” alternatives. There is potential in both these approaches and some research has been initiated, but the overwhelming message from last year’s international meeting on “Alternatives to the chemical control of weeds” was how little we knew about these options and how much less was being done for forestry purposes. This may be a “national” interest but forest sector support could give it a much-needed boost to its image and ultimately reduce its operational costs.

So what will the public perception be of pesticide use in ten or 20 years’ time?

And how will forestry be perceived? A good question – and it’s up to all of us to do something about it from now on.

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Pray for a wet summer and keep your hoses crossed

There was plenty of promise in the Hensley Review (see NZ Forestry, Vol 34, No. 4, February 1990); an expanded Rural Fire Fighting Fund (RFFF), regional co-ordination of fire based on the new regional Government reorganisation, the setting up of a National Rural Fire Authority (NRFAC) as well as a National Rural Fire Advisory Committee (NRFAC) and immediate implementation of some supporting legislation. A new Forest Rural Fires Act would follow.

The establishment of the NRFAC and the NRFAC with limited powers are the only two positive achievements to report so far. The NRFAC and NRFAC were set up by Cabinet and Ministerial decree rather than by legislative action.)

Staff have been appointed to the NRFAC (New Zealand Forestry, August 1990. Vol. 35 No. 2). Rural fire records and training material have been transferred to the NRFAC from the Ministry of Forestry (MOF). The responsibilities of the Secretary of Forestry and MOF contained in the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977, Fire Service Amendment Act 1987 and various Regulations have been transferred to the Chairperson of the New Zealand Fire Service Commission by memorandum.

The Minister of Internal Affairs has appointed members to the NRFAC. Two meetings have been held to date with the objective of assisting the Fire Service Commission with the initial work of the NRFAC.

There has been no progress with the introduction of the new RFFF for this fire season; no appointment of Regional Fire Co-ordinators by Regional Councils and no new legislation to back up the Hensley Review recommendations.

The original recommendation on the RFFF has been radically changed by a new proposal. There is no interim legislation or new Forest and Rural Fires Act.

NEW FIRE LEGISLATION IS BADLY NEEDED  
The lack of legislation will cause some serious concern in the rural fire sector.

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RURAL FIRE FIGHTING FUND

There has been a radical change proposed for recommendation 9 of the Hensley Review. It was intended that “the Rural Fire Fighting Fund be financed 50:50 by the Fire Service Commission and by the special 'Section 60A' levy (Forest and Rural Fires Amendment Act 1989) on RFAs”.

Following Cabinet approval of the Hensley Review recommendations, an officials Working Party was set up to ensure that an appropriate structure within the New Zealand Fire Service for representing the interests of rural people, fire fighters and forest owners was set up and appropriate funding arrangements were provided for the new structure.

Rural Fire Working Party (RFWP) members considered that the use of levies on RFAs was not an appropriate way to increase the RFFF to $1.2 million.

The RFWP recommended that Fire Service levy contributions should be raised to $800,000 from the present $600,000 and that State contributions should come through DOC and total a further $400,000, but uncertainty remains about whether or not DOC and Treasury agree to the provision of $400,000 as a State contribution to the RFFF.

It was originally intended to introduce the new RFFF on October 1, 1990. The Minister of Internal Affairs then changed the date to January 1, 1991 to cater for the likely delay in the passage of the Fire Service Amendment Bill (No. 2).

The old limited 1986 RFFF will still therefore apply in the meantime.

The Minister of Internal Affairs has approved the appointment of P. Burgout (Federated Farmers), N. Cooper (MOF), M. Dudfield (NRFA), M. Edwards (Defence), N. Farrell (Local Government), K. Hilliard (DOC), P. Olsen (Forest Owners) and D. Woodward (Fire Services) to the Committee.

The NRFAC will have the job of advising the NRFA on the new rural fire system and this is obviously going to be a difficult task in the circumstances.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it appears that rural fire control systems will not be adequate for the 1990-91 summer.

All County Fire Authorities have gone. In their place are fewer District Councils which are feeling their way with new staff and have larger areas to administer.

Many of the new Regional Councils are not interested in fire responsibilities and will not appoint regional fire co-ordinators.

Contrary to hopes, there is no improved RFFF with increased funds yet. Commercial forest owners are excluded from the proposal and DOC may opt out.

Authority lines are confused because the legislation that is needed is not yet in place.

Finally, New Zealand Forestry Corporation, as an RFA, is disintegrating with the sale of Timberlands cutting rights.

Fortunately, the New Zealand companies Fletcher Challenge (Tasman Forestry) and Carter Holt Harvey have been major purchasers of State forests. This will assist greatly in maintaining some stability.

Established forest owners will again be the cornerstone of effective fire control in rural areas.

Neill Cooper

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