

Wednesday, 2 September 2020

2020

(Houlahan, M., 2020)

Government backs dross action

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Firefighters at an entrance to the building holding toxic ouvea premix in Mataura. PHOTO: LAURA SMITH

The Government has added its heft to a legal attempt to get New Zealand Aluminium Smelters to move toxic waste stored in Mataura.

In July the Environmental Defence Society filed papers with the Environment Court seeking a declaration that potentially lethal smelter dross (called ouvea pre-mix) stored in the former Mataura paper mill should immediately be moved by smelter owners Rio Tinto.

Yesterday, Environment Minister David Parker, who in February said the Government was considering suing Rio Tinto over the dross, said the Government would join the EDS case as an interested party.

"The Government wants to ensure its expedited removal, to protect the Crown's interest and to assist the court as required," a spokesman said.

Mr Parker declined an interview as the case is going to the Environment Court.

The waste, a byproduct from the manufacture of aluminium, can release a deadly gas if it gets wet.

Earlier this year the building where it is stored was threatened by floodwaters, in recent weeks a burst sprinkler flooded the floor where the material sits, and on Monday a fire broke out in a building elsewhere in the complex.

New Zealand First list MP Mark Patterson visited Mataura yesterday, and said residents told they remained on edge after Monday's scare.

"I don't know if the premix was under imminent threat but it's another chapter in the saga which hangs over the town.

"I think the threat was as much about the sprinklers going off and getting the premix wet as it was about the fire," he said.

Mr Patterson, who took a petition to Parliament which called for urgent action to remove the dross, said he hoped the Government joining the EDS case would accelerate removal of the dross, but feared it could further delay that.

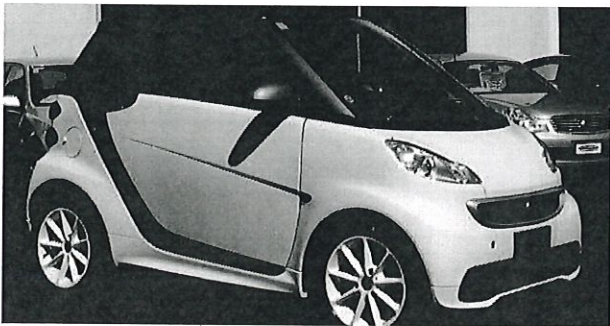
"Town is still on edge and it's still pretty raw to them, having to go through this every other month when there is a scare.

"The residents just want a solution, they just want it gone, and that is the danger. We need to step outside the lawyers and find a pragmatic solution ... if this was in the middle of Wellington or Auckland it would have been gone years ago. There is a real sense of injustice here."

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Yes please Ms. Collins can you see to it that we get another 5 year extension to the Rio Tinto grouping and all the mess they leave behind before they head away offshore.

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