



OIA16-0146

25 APR 2016

Claire Bleakley
President
GE Free New Zealand
president@gefree.org.nz

Dear Claire Bleakley

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

I refer to your official information request on 8 April 2016 relating to an inspection of the Plant and Food Research (PFR) Centre at Mt Albert, Auckland. You have requested all the correspondence and written and verbal information relating to that inspection in connection with the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act approval GMD101012. You have also requested responses to the following questions:

1. Why was MPI investigating the facility?
2. Why the GMO Apple research facility laboratory was given a "suspension notice"?
3. How many GMO apple or kiwifruit trees were missing?
4. Where were the trees sent?
5. Was Associate Professor Andrew Allan leading this research?
6. Was Dr Richard Espley involved in this research?
7. Did the research team involve Chinese members?
8. Did the research team involve Industry members?
9. If they were, has there been discipline given for this breach?
10. If so what?

Whilst it is not clear from your request, I understand that your request relates to the partial collapse of a filter through which air from a plant containment glasshouse is released into the external environment which occurred on 22 January 2016. The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) takes any event of potential contamination very seriously and visited the site the same day and initiated an investigation.

A summary of the aforementioned event, subsequent investigation, impact risk assessment, and measures taken in response is released to you under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) as set out below. Please be aware that questions three through ten are not relevant to the event. No trees were moved or are missing and none of the identified people were involved in research associated with the event.

Summary of the event

On Friday 22 January 2016, during a regular inspection of a physical containment level 2 (PC2) containment glasshouse, a PFR employee discovered that an air pre-filter had partially collapsed in the air extract filter room. This filter is the middle one of three that air passes through before exiting the building. All extraction fans were immediately shut down and access to the area was restricted. MPI was notified and visited the site that afternoon to assess the situation and assess risks and actions.

It was confirmed that the two remaining filters were intact and operating normally. The first of these filters is a particulate filter and screens out dust and other relatively large particles. The second filter (the partially collapsed one) is what is referred to as a "G4-rated filter" and is 98% efficient at 10 microns. The third filter is what is referred to as an "F7 filter" and is 99.9% efficient at 10 microns.

A risk assessment showed the only risk of potentially pollen-contaminated air escaping through the air extract filter room to the outside was during the time of the filter inspection; which lasted 18 seconds.

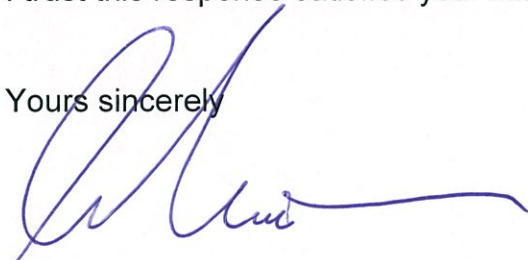
The glasshouse contained genetically modified petunia and apple trees. Only the petunias were in flower at the time of the event. The petunia isolation rooms and other parts of the glasshouse tested negative for the presence of pollen. For background information, petunia pollen is quite large, averaging around 30 microns.

Based on the negative pollen swab result, full functioning of the first pre-filter and the third F7 filter, and the short time of potential air exposure, MPI assessed the risk of pollen escape as negligible and decided not to mount a response. Further investigation could not determine the actual cause of the partial collapse of the filter.

The filter has since been repaired and strengthened. Procedures, training, and signage to inspect the filters without accessing the air extract room are also being implemented.

I trust this response satisfies your information request.

Yours sincerely



Chris Mawson
Acting Director Verification Services