



Department of
Education

Ms Kate Ruttiman
General Secretary
Queensland Teachers' Union
Email: kruttiman@qtu.asn.au

Dear Ms Ruttiman *Kate*

Thank you for your letter to the Director-General dated 15 June 2021 regarding the use of Chemwatch as part of the department's chemical management system. I have been asked to respond on the Director-General's behalf.

The development of a new chemical management system for the Department of Education has been conducted over a number of years, commencing with a review of systems processes by an external company, Chemwatch, with expertise in hygiene and hazardous substances management.

A key element of this phase identified the type, number and volume of chemicals typically used in schools. This allowed the development of a new system that was relative to the level of risk. In summary, this phase recommended a reduced level of 'paperwork' (for example, a simplified risk assessment process which reduces administration by approximately 60%) which will provide a greater level of compliance with regulatory requirements while also streamlining processes that need to be undertaken by a school.

The department, in acting to address non-compliance with chemical management regulatory requirements in schools, has consulted all unions, principal associations and other key stakeholders on the proposed Chemical Management Procedure since early 2019. This includes the provision of step by step resources and webinars (with an average attendance of more than 100 at each session), and a 45 minute online awareness program.

The Procedure aims to provide a holistic approach to the management of all chemical risks, with a greater level of control for higher risk chemicals. In practice, and as you have indicated in your letter, this is a very small number and it is expected that there will be a reduction in use of non-essential higher risk chemicals.

The Procedure was implemented on 27 January 2021 after approximately 18 months of communication, instruction and training. To further support the implementation and to assist schools, a transitional and phased approach has been promoted. This involves a two year transitional phase for implementation of all the procedural elements.

It is acknowledged that there will be some work to establish and become familiar with the new processes, however ultimately there will be reduced administrative requirements after the initial work is completed.

The first phase of work, which was to be finalised by June 2021, was the completion of Chemical Management Plans within schools. This is a one-page document that identifies minimum requirements.

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In recent conversations with Ms Leah Mertens of the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) and I, it was confirmed that an extension to 30 September 2021 has been established in relation to the first phase.

I also confirmed that the Organisational Safety and Wellbeing team will work with Regions and Schools to assist in the completion and compliance of this stage. However, no further extensions will be granted past 30 September 2021.

It is also noted that over the next two years, other associated processes such as the Curriculum Activity Risk Assessment (CARA) process will be in transition. There is no requirement to use Chemwatch risk assessments for the CARA process at this time as it is acknowledged that some schools will not have fully transitioned to this process. The use of Chemwatch risk assessment is scheduled for June 2022.

I understand that a meeting between senior officers of the department and the QTU is being arranged to clarify and address the concerns raised in your correspondence. However, should you wish to discuss this matter further, I invite you to contact Ms Lisa Newbold, A/Director Organisational Safety and Wellbeing on telephone 07 3513 6543 or by email on lisa.newbold@qed.qld.gov.au

I trust this information clarifies the situation for you and reaffirms the department's commitment to the safety of staff, students and others in our schools.

Yours sincerely



SHANNON COOK
Deputy Director-General
People and Corporate Services

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