

Port to trial system to capture, neutralise gas

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A system to recapture and neutralise methyl bromide used for some container fumigations at Port Nelson is being trialled at the port.

However, fumigation company Genera is waiting for a decision from Australia's quarantine service on whether it accepts phosphine as an alternative to methyl bromide, before installing a larger, separate recapture system for fumigations of large stacks of timber.

Genera technical adviser Alan Perry said the company was leasing the portable recapture equipment for containers from Australian company Nordiko, to help it comply with strict new rules on methyl bromide in the Nelson City Council's air quality plan.

Mr Perry said the technology, trialled yesterday, would be in use by the end of the week and would be a first for New Zealand.

The recapture system would have the capacity to enable up to eight containers to be fumigated at a time and the gas recovered.

Methyl bromide is an odourless ozone-depleting gas used to kill bugs in timber and other exports to meet overseas standards.

The use of the gas has been controversial in Nelson. Campaigners allege it has been a factor in the deaths of six port Nelson workers from motor neuron disease since 2000.

Mr Perry said it was difficult to say how often the equipment would be used, as demand would vary according to how busy the port was.

However, he expected it to be used at least once a week. He would not say how much it cost to lease the equipment, but said it was "expensive".

The recapture system would be used on all container loads where over 3kg of methyl bromide was used, and on all containers containing logs for export.

"It's a significant thing in terms of Nelson, it's the first in New Zealand and the vanguard of what's going on in the world," Mr Perry said.

Nelson was the first New Zealand port to use the system because of community concerns over the use of the gas, and because the port was

near sensitive areas, he said. Mr Perry said an application had been made to Australian Quarantine by Biosecurity New Zealand to use phosphine as a fumigant instead of methyl bromide. If this was successful, large-scale fumigations of stacked timber at Port Nelson would not be necessary.

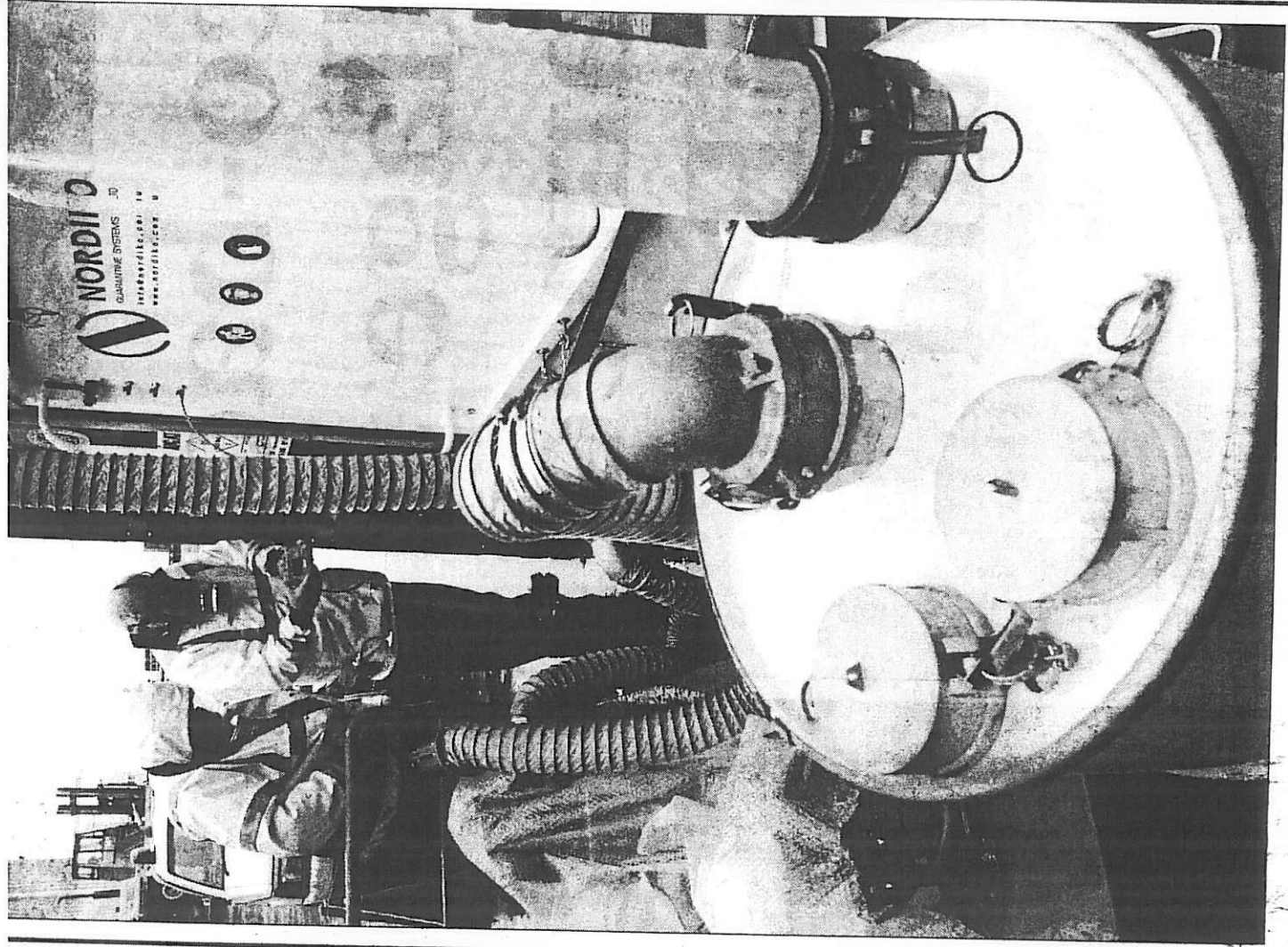
If the application was unsuccessful, Genera would take a new look at using the recapture system for big timber fumigations, he said.

Marilyn Tunncliffe, whose former husband Matt McKa worked at Port Nelson and died of motor neuron disease, said it was wonderful news that the system would be used.

However, she also has concerns about using phosphine as a fumigant, she said.

Campaigners Against the use of Toxic Sprays spoke woman Rachel Reese said she expected that Genera would start the trial on small containers before scaling the operation.

"I presume that all the necessary safety precautions are being undertaken and that Port Nelson will be ensuring that happens, and so will the Nelson City Council."



KEEPING A LID ON IT: Seguei Ivanine, left, of Australian company Nordiko and Port Nelson safety adviser Jim Lane demonstrate the methyl bromide recapture system. MAIL PHOTO/MARTIN DE RUYTER 193644