



Our Ref: 4-22192

MINISTER FOR HEALTH

ATTORNEY GENERAL: ELECTORAL AFFAIRS

FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Mr John Harris  
Lot 18 Clifton Road  
YARLOOP WA 6218

Dear Mr Harris

Thank you for your letter dated 2 August 2003 concerning emissions from Alcoa's Wagerup Refinery.

I have asked the Department of Health to provide comment on the issues and attach the response received for your information.

I trust the information provided clarifies the situation and is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

JIM MCGINTY MLA  
MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Att:

10 SEP 2003



## *Memorandum*

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**Reference : 4-22192**

**Date: 15 August 2003**

**Attention of : Minister for Health**

**Subject : EMISSIONS FROM ALCOA'S WAGERUP REFINERY**

There is little doubt that emissions from Alcoa's Wagerup Refinery have impacted on the health of adjacent neighbours. Mr Harris and his family are such neighbours and he has previously corresponded with the former Minister for Health advising of his concern over the level of emissions and the resultant impacts on his family.

Inquiries with Alcoa and other community members confirm an 'emission event' on 2 August 2003, the date Mr Harris nominates in his letter. Emission events are described by the community as causing significant distress to many residents, and are not uncommon in the locality. The duration varies considerably, as does the times of occurrence. It is not unusual that they sometimes last only a couple of hours. No reason for such events has been established, despite intensive monitoring designed to capture undesirable compounds. Monitoring stations have been located in the yards of some residents, so that immediate sampling can commence as soon as the event has an impact. Events can range from a strong odour, which may not impact on health, to the sudden onset of respiratory distress with no accompanying unusual odour. Whilst environmental conditions can undoubtedly contribute to such events, they appear not to be the sole influence.

Alcoa personnel and senior Department of Environment officers are continuing to work on establishing the reason behind these high impact events, including the occurrence on 2 August 2003. At this stage work has been unproductive and frustrating to all concerned. The monitoring program being undertaken this year by the CSIRO should provide valuable assistance. However, in the meantime, residents such as Mr Harris may continue to be exposed to these irregular and unpredictable situations.

**Executive Director  
Population Health**