

# Sawmill starts trial PCP cleanup

• *Tapanui*  
By Glenn Conway

The long-awaited cleanup of poisonous timber treatment chemicals at **Blue Mountain** Lumber has begun in a New Zealand first trial the West Otago company hopes will eventually help other sawmills remove similar contaminations.

United States chemical technology is being used in the \$250,000 trial which is 80% funded by the Ministry for the Environment with **Blue Mountain** Lumber and the Otago Regional Council footing the rest of the bill.

Three years ago, the Conical Hill-based company discovered large traces of pentachlorophenol (PCP) in soil on the site. This chemical was widely used in the timber industry until the early 1980s. Malaysian-based Ernslaw One bought the sawmill from the New Zealand government in 1990.

Plant operations manager Matt Hitchings yesterday said he was thrilled work had finally begun on cleaning up the chemical.

The contaminated area takes up 100m x 80m but initial work will focus on a smaller area. Californian-based Laco Associates, which specialises in chemical contamination cleanup operations, is co-ordinating the work with resource and environmental consultants Kingett Mitchell, from Tauranga.

Holes were drilled in key points in the area and tomorrow, the first injections of the ozone microbubble technology will be poured into them to help neutralise the PCP below the ground.

This method, which has been successfully used in the United States, is thought to be less expensive and more effective than other ways of trying to contain and remove the chemical.

Despite thoughts the chemical may have been in the ground for more than 40 years, there was a good chance the **Blue Mountain** trial would be successful, according to contaminated site consultant **Brendon Love** from Kingett Mitchell Ltd.

The chemical oxidation process penetrated deep below ground and was one of the most aggressive treatments available.

The trial will last three months and monitoring of progress will be made every week with samples sent to a Hamilton laboratory for analysis. A report must be forwarded to the ministry by the end of July, measuring its success or otherwise.

Mr Hitchings said the company was thrilled to have secured the trial, which he believed could spell the end of what had been a lengthy process to try and remove the PCP in the most cost-effective way.

The chemical contamination was first detected after regional council testing of eels and other fish in the Pomahaka River returned high levels of PCP.

Regional council resource director Selva Selvarajah was also pleased the trial cleanup was ready to start. **Blue Mountain** Lumber deserved credit for its proactive role in dealing with the situation, he said.



**PHOTO: GLENN CONWAY**  
Chemical purge . . . **Blue Mountain** Lumber operations manager Matt Hitchings (left) and Kingett Mitchell contaminated site consultant **Brendon Love** inspect a chemically polluted area at the Tapanui sawmill that will be involved in a trial cleanup.