

Bid to regulate pesticide use

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A market vendor at the Suva Municipal Market. A quick survey by FRIEND reveals that market vendors dip their vegetables in orthene to kill bugs. Picture: FILE

AS many as 2500 petitions have been collected so far by FRIEND Fiji in a bid to request the Office of the Prime Minister to convene a necessary stakeholders meeting to regulate the registration and use of all pesticides in Fiji.

"Currently there is no regulation and when we requested for information from the registrar of chemicals at the Ministry of Agriculture, we were told this is confidential information.

"This should be public information. We need to know how many pesticides are in Fiji and whether these are safe for public health," FRIEND Fiji CEO Sashi Kiran said.

"A quick survey on the market indicated that market vendors dip their vegetables in orthene to kill bugs just before these vegetables make its way on our food table.

"An active ingredient in orthene is known as acephate, which is also a known carcinogenic.

"Most offices are sprayed with insecticides and workers are exposed to these chemicals. Do we know what these chemicals are? How much time should be given before staff can occupy these offices? What should be the distance of baits from a work station? Those that do not smell have been deemed most dangerous."

Ms Kiran said there had been an increase in reported cancer cases and "when we look at the root causes, there is a lot exposure to carcinogenic substances".

"Working in the rural areas, we have been very aware that farmers are using weedicides without the use of any protective gear.

"We often see spraying without any gloves, mouthguard etc."