

## RESTRICTED - POLICY

### FINAL NOTE OF 1<sup>ST</sup> CHEMICAL HAZARD IDENTIFICATION AND RISK SURVEILLANCE (CHaIRS) GROUP MEETING

**DATE & TIME: TUESDAY 2 DECEMBER 2008 AT 10:30AM**

**VENUE: CONFERENCE ROOM 3, AVIATION HOUSE, LONDON**

#### ATTENDEES

Nick Tomlinson (Chair)	(NT)	Food Standards Agency
John Caseley (Secretary)	(JC)	Food Standards Agency
Jillian Spindura	(JS)	Food Standards Agency
Philip Randles	(PS)	Food Standards Agency
Chris Livesey	(CL)	Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Jo Payne	(JP)	Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Arthur Otter	(AO)	Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Steven Wyllie	(SW)	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Alison Gowers	(AG)	Environment Agency
Paul Johnson	(PJ)	Health and Safety Laboratory
Martin Rose	(MJ)	Central Science Laboratory
David Webb	(DW)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate
Steve Fairhurst	(SF)	Health and Safety Executive (via tele-conference)

#### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

1. NT welcomed members to the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Chemical Hazard Identification and Risk Surveillance (CHaIRS) Group. Apologies for absence had been received from Rebecca Garcia (Defra).

#### CHaIRS OVERVIEW

2. CL provided an overview of the role of the new group. He explained that one of the main objectives for the CHaIRS group was to provide a single contact point for chemical contamination incidents. VLA currently notifies these incidents<sup>1</sup> to the FSA and copies the minute to Defra. FSA independently assess the risk and then report back to the VLA, requesting action to be taken or pass the matter on to LA Trading Standards; in the case of the latter, VLA request that they be kept in-the-loop so they can forewarn the farmer that a visit is imminent. Two examples of the type of notifications the VLA send out, and replies to those notifications, were tabled, for information.

3. CL proposed that in future all members of CHaIRS be copied in to these notifications. This would ensure that all departments/agencies represented were aware of the incident right at the start and could then work together in a joined-up way. In this sense CHaIRS was a virtual Incidents Group.

4. CL added that there have been a number of recent chemical incidents where the existence of a CHaIRS group would have been invaluable in terms of incident response. These were identified as follows:

- **Goongumpas** – JS confirmed that the Agency had become aware in September 2007 of an incident in Goongumpas, Cornwall involving farm land contaminated by orange dust<sup>2</sup> from an adjoining valley with a history of mining. The incident prompted a detailed

<sup>1</sup> To put this into context, the VLA notified the FSA & Defra of 110 incidents in 2007

<sup>2</sup> The dust was subsequently found to be common fungal spore types found in the air during much of the year

cross-Agency investigation, with the EA in particular heavily involved. JS said that if the Agency had known more at the start of the food safety investigation then this would have resulted in a more 'seamless' response. JS said that investigations found slightly elevated levels of arsenic in food in the area and added that future surveillance work was planned in future to establish whether this was a more widespread issue.

- **Buncefield** – JC gave the example of the Buncefield fire in December 2005. Following this 'high' level incident, JC explained that a multi-agency Scoping Group was convened in June 2008 to discuss the results of an investigation by the VLA into allegations by a farmer (whose farm bordered the Buncefield site) that the PFOS in the foam used by the firefighters to tackle the blaze had caused abnormalities in his calves. The results of investigations were 'inconclusive' and the purpose of the Scoping Group meeting had been to prepare and share reactive lines in case the farmer or his local MP went public on the issue. MR commented on the importance during incidents such as this for the sampling programme to be properly co-ordinated, representative and targeted.
- **Lead in Eggs** – JC gave a further example of an on-farm incident earlier in the year involving lead in free-range organic eggs from Waitrose. The source of the lead was lead shot from a clay pigeon shoot adjoining the farm. JC added that this incident had a multi-Agency dimension and resulted in a Scoping Group meeting<sup>3</sup> in June.

#### **DRAFT CHAIRS TERMS OF REFERENCE**

5. JC introduced this item. He explained that paper CH/2008/1 including the draft terms of reference, key work areas and membership of the group was circulated to members last week.

6. JC confirmed that membership of CHAIRS is flexible. For example, a specific topic may come up for discussion, which may involve a member bringing along a colleague with expertise in that field to contribute to discussion. In this instance the colleague can come along as a 'guest' for that particular meeting. JC added that if departments wished to bring along additional colleagues or send deputies to future CHAIRS meetings then this should be communicated to the Secretariat beforehand.

7. NT asked for comments on the ToR. It was agreed that the reference to additional costs (which were not considered significant) could be taken out of the ToR. AG also asked for clarification regarding the specific incidents to be covered. CL said that these were predominantly incidents with potential food safety implications, but added that there may be other issues to be borne in mind (e.g. human health, animal health or welfare, environmental issues, operator safety).

8. In connection with 'reporting' arrangements. JC raised the issue of reporting from EA of Cat 1 & 2 incidents, pointing out that the Agency was only notified by the EA of 23 out of 827 serious contamination incidents in 2007. It was agreed that the FSA would discuss with EA outside the meeting what could be done to strengthen notification procedures between EA and FSA in future.

#### **ACTION: JOHN CASELEY**

9. SF asked for clarity regarding the proposed reporting arrangements. For example, were notifications from the VLA the only route by which CHAIRS would be informed of new incidents? MR added that under a PSD run scheme wildlife incidents involving abuses of pesticides could potentially be reported to the group and other schemes involving crops, fish and bees could be added in due course. However, CL said that as CHAIRS was in its infancy, the group should start small and initially focus on notifications from the VLA but he

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<sup>3</sup> Attended by FSA, VLA, Defra & Oxfordshire TS

hoped that other organisations would report their own incidents to the Group as well and as soon as possible. Over the long term he saw no reason why that notification system could not be extended and there was no reason why intelligence on emerging chemical incidents could not be communicated between CHaIRS members. It was agreed that it was important that CHaIRS did not duplicate work being carried out elsewhere .

10. Under key work areas it was proposed that outputs from the CHaIRS meeting are reported to the new UK Zoonoses, Animal Diseases and Infections Group (UKZADI). SW, whose team provide the Secretariat for UKZADI, confirmed that he would put CHaIRS on the agenda for the next UKZADI meeting.

**ACTION: STEVEN WYLLIE**

11. SF asked whether, in the event of another Buncefield, CHaIRS would be expected to deal with the incident. NT responded that there were already tried and tested mechanisms in place for responding to 'high' level CBRN incidents and this group was not therefore intended to 'lead' on these incidents. However, the group could nevertheless have an important role to play sharing information, providing advice (e.g. on sampling to be undertaken), carrying out surveillance and generally adding value to the process. SW said that whilst COMS representation within CHaIRS was not essential, in cases where there was a multi-agency dimension, a cross-agency communications strategy should always be considered.

12. JC requested that any other comments on the ToR reach him by no later than 12 December. A revised ToR would then be circulated to members.

**ACTION: ALL**

#### **FSA INCIDENT PREVENTION STRATEGY**

13. PR gave a brief presentation (tabled for information) regarding the FSA's Incident Prevention Strategy. He explained the key themes to the strategy:

- intelligence gathering and horizon scanning – using a database to predict the future and provide an early warning system for food safety
- building trust and partnership - as part of this work, wish to reach small & medium sized enterprises, including farms
- better science and better regulation - as incoming intelligence improves, the Agency will be better able to target research and surveillance

14. PR added that if there was an appetite for it amongst members, he was happy to come along to a future CHaIRS meeting to discuss specific projects as part of the strategy.

#### **FUTURE ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

15. SW raised the issue of ash in bedding as one that CHaIRS may wish to discuss in future. MR added that in connection with Archer Buncefield there was little data re: background values for PFOS so this was a potential area for future research. CL added that following the Goongumpas arsenic incident there is a need for further Arsenic surveillance. JC asked for any other potential items for future discussion at CHaIRS to be e-mailed to him by close of play on 12 December.

**ACTION: ALL MEMBERS**

#### **AOB**

16. SW said that Defra's RADAR Team had a GIS mapping system, showing agriculture within an affected area<sup>4</sup>.

**John Caseley  
CHaIRS Secretariat  
February 2009**

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<sup>4</sup> Any request for this information during incidents would need to go through a prioritisation process, as mapping is resource intensive and the RADAR team regularly has a long list of requests.