

PROTECT – INVESTIGATION

DRAFT NOTE OF CHEMICAL HAZARD IDENTIFICATION AND RISK SURVEILLANCE (CHaIRS) GROUP MEETING

DATE & TIME: 14 DECEMBER 2010 AT 1:30PM

VENUE: ROOM 403, AVIATION HOUSE

ATTENDEES

Colin Houston	(Chair)	Food Standards Agency
Matthew Cooper	(MC)	Food Standards Agency
Barry Maycock	(BM)	Food Standards Agency
Jo Payne	(JP)	Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Steve Wyllie	(SW)	Defra
David Harris	(DH)	Animal Health
Simon Barron	(SB)	Environment Agency
Graham Urquhart	(GU)	Health Protection Agency
Martin Rose	(MR)	Fera (via teleconference)
Martin Ball	(MB)	Health and Safety Executive (via teleconference)
Chris Livesey	(CL)	Veterinary Laboratories Agency (via teleconference)

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced himself explaining that due to re-organisation of work streams within the Agency he had recently taken on the role of Chair for these meetings. The Chair also apologised to members for the length of time that has elapsed since the last meeting.
2. Apologies for absence were received from Terry Donohoe (FSA), Paul Johnson (HSL), Cath Tomlin (EA) and John Caseley (FSA).

MATTERS ARISING

3. The Chair asked members whether they were content with the note of the February meeting and whether they considered it an accurate record of the meeting. All members were content.
4. MC then provided a verbal update on matters arising from the last CHaIRS Group meeting held on the 23 February, as follows:
 - One outstanding item from the last meeting related to ragwort poisoning incidents and the possibility of producing an advisory leaflet for farmers to alert them to the dangers of this weed.

CL provided an update on this issue informing members that he had prepared a paper on ragwort prior to the last CHaIRS meeting and had also been in discussion with a representative from English Nature who have responsibility for the control of ragwort. CL commented that English Nature had to balance promoting environmental diversity and controlling the weed, due to the potential harm it can pose to livestock.

MR asked whether CL had discussed the issue of ragwort poisoning with colleagues from Fera and CL confirmed that they had been involved with discussions. JP asked whether the desired outcome of the discussions was to produce a document aimed at farmers warning of the dangers of ragwort. CL confirmed that this would be the eventual outcome but it was important to first clarify with the position of English Nature and establish the best ways of balancing scientific interests and farming issues.

SW commented that he agreed with the need for a coordinated approach and also suggested that a representative from Natural England to the next meeting. Members agreed with this proposal.

Action: Secretariat

The Chair asked if members had any other thoughts on this issue or useful information regarding ragwort that they send them through to the secretariat.

Action: All Members

- At the last meeting the EA gave an update on their waste protocols programme, which is considering materials classified as waste and whether they pose a risk to the environment. This issue was discussed further under agenda item 5.
- During discussion on the group's terms of reference at the last meeting there was reference to the HAIRS Annual report and the Chemical Hazards and Poisons report. Links to both were circulated to members. The terms of reference were discussed again under agenda item 3.
- One incident reviewed at the last meeting was the Invergordon fire affecting fishmeal. At the meeting members asked about the fate of the affected fishmeal. The FSA confirmed that in this instance the feed was destroyed and did not enter into the food chain. The FSA have also noted Defra's point about having a standardized approach to dealing with these type of incidents.
- Finally, at our last meeting, the EA referred to work being carried out on lead shot, specifically by a group set up by Defra of non-Government stakeholders and agreed to provide further information. MC reminded members that details of the Lead Ammunitions Group were circulated to members on 29 November.

GROUP'S REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP (CH/2010/3)

5. The Chair introduced this item explaining that revised terms of reference were circulated to the group prior to the meeting (paper CH/2010/3 refers). CH added that the changes to the terms of reference are fairly minor in nature, with the main focus continuing to be on incident response and reviews. The review section has been expanded to elaborate on the type of issues that will be looked at as part of the reviews, such as roles and responsibilities, communications, procedures, overall management, root cause and corrective action.

6. References to horizon scanning in the terms of reference have been removed, on the basis that the FSA is in the process of setting up an Emerging Risks Evaluation Board that will be specifically focusing on horizon scanning issues and we do not wish to duplicate effort. Regarding the membership of CHaIRS, since the last meeting Colin Houston has joined the group. Also Alison Gowers from the EA has left the group and her replacement is Cath Tomlin.
7. CH asked members for their comments on the revised terms of reference, in particular views on the remit of the group, frequency of meetings and membership. JP questioned the inclusion of the sentence on page 2 at the end of the bullet titled Risk Assessment that states *'Most incidents will continue to be mainly or entirely FSA's responsibility'*. Other members agreed that other Agencies may have the lead on incidents discussed at CHaIRS and that this sentence could be misleading. Members felt that the sentence did not add anything to the terms of reference and it was agreed that it should be removed.
8. SW informed members that Ruth Lysons would shortly be retiring from Defra and he would provide the group with the name of her replacement. SW also asked who had the responsibility for reporting the outputs from CHaIRS meetings to UKZADI and offered to take on this role as he attends UKZADI meetings on behalf of Defra. Members agreed that it would make sense for SW to take on this role.
9. The Chair informed members that the secretariat would make the agreed changes to the document and re-circulate to members

REVIEW OF INCIDENT RE: PAINT SPILL INTO WATERCOURSE NR GLANTON, NORTHUMBRIA

10. MC introduced this agenda item explaining that the FSA was notified by David Harris at Animal Health on 11 October 2010 of this incident involving a spillage of paint and paint products from a goods vehicle into the Coe Burn and Aln River in Northumberland.
11. During the incident Animal Health worked closely with the EA, FSA and VLA and, following consultation, issued a press release to farmers on 13 October. The press release, advising farmers that whilst the risk to health and welfare of farmed livestock from this incident was considered 'low', farmers should nevertheless keep their livestock away from affected watercourses (until visible contamination had cleared), monitor their stock closely for illness and evidence of access to contaminated water and report any suspicion of illness to their Private Veterinary Surgeon.
12. The Chair commented that he felt that this incident was a good example of CHaIRS working in practice, i.e. one member bringing an incident to the attention of other members and then working together in a joined-up manner. JP agreed and added that from a VLA perspective this incident had run more smoothly than previous incidents. Other Agencies were also involved from the beginning which meant that advice was issued more quickly.

13. SW asked whether the VLA had the capacity to send warning messages to regulatory laboratories and local vets if they thought that the risk to livestock from an incident was sufficiently high. JP confirmed that the VLA had a mechanism in place for communicating such messages, although DH informed members that in this instance Animal Health had alerted local vets and laboratories themselves.
14. CL asked whether the EA had mechanisms in place for alerting other Agencies in the event of an incident. SB informed members that the EA was required to notify the FSA of environmental incidents that may affect food/feed but were looking at wider communications when responding to incidents.
15. CL commented that surface water should not be used for animals due to uncertainty. SW commented that this wasn't the case in this instance and the intention was to alert farmers of the potential risk to animals that may have had to access the affected waterway. SW also asked if it was Defra policy that surface water should not be used for livestock. JP responded that there was guidance that advised against using surface water and which states that it is down to the farmers to prove that it is suitable.

THE INCREASING USE OF WASTE AS ANIMAL BEDDING

16. SB (EA) introduced this agenda item explaining that the EA are seeing an increase in the use of waste used as animal bedding on farms. Whilst some of the waste material being used is suitable for use, in their view, other material (e.g. shredded tyres including wire) can pose a risk to animal health, welfare, food safety and the environment.
17. With the assistance of the CHaIRS Group, the EA wish to produce the following:
- a list of wastes suitable for bedding;
 - a list of materials that require further consideration;
 - a list of materials unacceptable for use as bedding;
 - a method/framework for consistently and robustly assessing the risks and suitability of wastes being proposed as animal bedding;
 - a code of practice for suppliers; and
 - a checklist guide for farmers.
18. The Chair asked members for their comments on the above proposals and their suggestions for taking this work forward. MB commented that HSE had an interest in this area, due to concerns about the health hazards to farm workers and had been working to raise awareness of the issue amongst farm workers. The Chair asked members for their views on setting up a separate sub-group to look at the issue and working up a paper to bring back to the main CHaIRS meeting. Members agreed that setting up a cross Government sub-group would be the best way and SB welcomed the proposal as it would hopefully mean that any outputs from this work would have greater impact.
19. DH asked SB whether he could clarify if the EA were looking to produce a list of approved waste materials that would be allowed to be used as animal

bedding. SB said that the EA would like to produce cross-agency guidance and also put together a cc list of people to contact for a risk assessment when the EA are informed of new waste materials coming to the market. MR agreed that it was important to assess new waste materials coming into the market and suggested that the sub-group should co-ordinate/share the outcomes of the project with the EU to ensure a joined up approach as other Member States are likely to have similar issues.

20. SW commented that as resources are low across Government it is important to class waste material as acceptable/not acceptable as at present there is a grey area. MB commented that it was also important to get farmers onside as they see the waste material as a cheap replacement for natural bedding and may not be aware of the potential dangers that it may pose to their livestock. GU asked to be kept informed of progress, as the HPA have an interest with regards to possible public health issues.

21. SB informed the group that the EA would be happy to lead the proposed sub-group, to which members agreed. The Chair asked SB to circulate any previous papers to the group for background information and to help them identify the right people from their departments. The Chair also asked members to send nominations for the sub-group to the secretariat, adding that he would contact SB directly to discuss the aims of the subgroup.

Action: All members

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

22. The Chair asked members whether they had any other issues that they would like to discuss under AOB.

- Geo-chemical lead on farm incidents – JP informed the group that she would like to raise awareness of the group to potential problems with the way that geo-chemical lead on farm incidents are currently reported. JP explained that at present geo-chemical lead incidents are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, however, it is evident from VMD data that heavy metal residues in offal are elevated. JP added that it would be useful to identify whether the presence of heavy metal residues was predominately due to farming on land in areas known to have high levels of geo-chemical lead and, if this was confirmed, producing a protocol for dealing with lead on farm incidents in those areas.

BM informed members that the Food Safety Division had submitted a proposal to carry out a research and surveillance project looking at the levels of lead in livestock from areas known to have high levels of geographical lead. JP commented that there are known geo-chemical lead areas across the country and most failures to meet regulatory limits were from lambs finished in areas with high lead soils. The Chair suggested that it would be prudent to wait and see if the FSA survey gets the go-ahead, to which members agreed.

- GU provided an update to members on the ongoing Rhodia incident involving alleged white phosphorous poisoning amongst wild birds at a Rhodia site. GU informed members that the HPA had been contacted by

Rhodia in relation to concerned members of the public who had seen material released as part of an FOI request. Due to the public concerns Rhodia is looking to commission an independent study to consider human health risks.

- CL commented that he would like arsenic in soil (in South West England), geochemical lead and ragwort to be considered as potential future agenda items for the group. These comments were noted.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

23. The Chair informed members that the next meeting was due to be held in March 2011 and that the secretariat would confirm the date in the New Year.

Matthew Cooper
CHaIRS Secretariat
January 2011