

RESTRICTED - POLICY

FINAL NOTE OF 3RD CHEMICAL HAZARD IDENTIFICATION AND RISK SURVEILLANCE (CHaIRS) GROUP MEETING

DATE & TIME: TUESDAY 30 JUNE 2009 AT 1:30PM

VENUE: CONFERENCE ROOM 2, 4TH FLOOR, AVIATION HOUSE, LONDON

ATTENDEES

Chris Livesey (Chair)	Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Jo Payne	Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Andrew Frost	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Alison Gowers	Environment Agency
Martin Rose	Food and Environment Research Agency
Ovnair Sepai	Health Protection Agency
David Harris	Animal Health
Derek Renshaw	Food Standards Agency
Jillian Spindura	Food Standards Agency
Philip Randles	Food Standards Agency
John Caseley(Secretary)	Food Standards Agency

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chair welcomed all attendees to the 3rd meeting of the Chemical Hazard Identification and Risk Surveillance Group (CHaIRS). Apologies for absence have been received from Chris Pidgeon (PSD), Chris Mawdsley (HSE), Paul Johnson (HSL), Steve Wyllie (Defra), Rebecca Garcia (Defra) and David Webb (VMD).

MATTERS ARISING

2. The Secretary provided a verbal update on matters arising from the last CHaIRS Group meeting, as follows:

- At the last meeting, on 25 March one action was to brief the UK Zoonoses, Animal Diseases and Infections Group (UKZADI) about the new CHaIRS group. The Secretary confirmed that a briefing document was drawn up by Secretariat, circulated to the CHaIRS group and subsequently tabled, for information, at UKZADI's May meeting. One member asked about any feedback from UKZADI to the briefing paper. The Secretary agreed to find out more.

ACTION: SECRETARIAT

- The group's terms of reference were discussed at the last meeting and a few minor revisions were agreed. Revised terms of reference had now been circulated to members, for information.
- Another action from the last meeting concerns the delineation of a Forward Work Plan for the group. The Secretary explained that, so far, some useful suggestions have been received from members (e.g. arsenic surveillance, PFOS research and recycled material as animal bedding) and these will be included within the plan. However, he added that further suggestions from members would be appreciated and therefore asked members to provide additional items for consideration by Friday 10 July. Following this deadline the forward work plan would be drawn up by the Secretariat and circulated to members for comment.

ACTION: ALL MEMBERS

- Members were informed that the Food Standards Agency published its annual report of incidents on 28 May. The report, which includes details of CHaIRS,¹ is available on the Agency's website and hard copies of the report were made available to members.

¹ Page 16 of the report refers.

- The Chair said that a draft European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) opinion on arsenic is due very shortly and so suggested that the group hold fire on discussing arsenic until this opinion was published.

REVIEW OF NEW NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES

3. Members were asked for their views as part of the review of the new reporting procedures introduced since the last meeting, whereby VLA copy in nominated officials (from departments represented on CHaIRS) to the initial notification minute. One member said he found the notifications 'fascinating'. Another asked whether it was acceptable to forward notifications to colleagues within his organisation, as they may have dealings with the same farmer. Whilst members did not envisage a specific problem with this request, it was agreed that, prior to approval being given, the Secretariat would check the legislation (namely the Data Protection Act) to clarify the rules and advise members accordingly.

ACTION: SECRETARIAT

4. One member referred to an on-farm incident notified by VLA involving lead poisoning in cattle² (attributed to silage cut from a field adjoining a clay pigeon shoot), where advice was sought regarding who was 'leading' on the contaminated land issue in this instance. It was confirmed that it would generally be the local authority who would 'lead' on this issue. For example, if the use of land was to change (to a clay pigeon shoot), then an application would need to be made to the LA. Alternatively, practices such as this may be covered by a tenancy agreement. To address the issue of lead poisoning on-farms arising from shoots, it was proposed that a code of practice should be drawn up involving the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association (CPSA) and British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC). It was agreed to consider this suggestion as a part of the Food Standards Agency's future incident prevention activities.

ACTION: FSA

5. The Chair suggested that in view of the LA involvement in contaminated land issues, consideration should be given to including LACORS within the CHaIRS group. The Secretariat agreed to consider this further.

ACTION: SECRETARIAT

[FOIA s31(1)(g) and s31(2)(a) and (c)]

² Incident FSI 2009-024 – notification circulated to CHaIRS ON 18 May

USE OF RECYCLED MATERIAL AS ANIMAL BEDDING

11. The Chair introduced this item. Members were informed that this item related to concerns about the use of recycled material as animal bedding. The Chair explained that farmers are using recycled material, including sawdust, wood shavings, and ash from paper mill incinerators and power stations, as bedding. These materials are being used for environmental reasons and/or to save money. He added that the specific concerns related to safety (specifically animal, operator and food safety).

12. The Chair confirmed that recycled and byproduct materials are being used and promoted for use as bedding and bedding conditioners in the farming press. He referred to an article from 2008 in Farmers Weekly³ in which Roger Blowey - a leading cattle vet in the country – discusses the benefits of using paper ash. Paper ash is a desiccant. Bedding desiccants reduce moisture in bedding, which is good for mastitis control.

13. As regards specific health concerns, the Chair said that ash dust may be an irritant and may cause respiratory problems amongst animals or workers on farms, although he acknowledged that in the Farmers Weekly article water was being added to reduce dust. There were also concerns about possible combustion products within the paper ash (e.g. PAHs, furans, dioxins) which may be linked to birth defects. One member added that wood shavings may be a source of pentachlorophenol and that there are a large number of potential contaminants which may be present in recycled and byproduct materials.

14. As regards the likelihood of livestock consuming the bedding, the Chair said that experience with bonfire ash suggests that ash can be very palatable to cattle⁴. The Chair confirmed that ingestion of bonfire ash had been linked to lead poisoning in the past and there were records of contaminated bedding having caused poisoning in previous on-farm incidents⁵.

15. As regards relevant legislation/guidance in place, one member referred to two documents, namely a draft waste quality protocol, which includes various uses for paper sludge, including as a dessicant in bedding and a draft quality protocol for the manufacture of products from paper sludge ash. It was confirmed that details regarding the above had been provided to the Secretariat, who, in turn, agreed to circulate to the entire group for information.

ACTION: SECRETARIAT

16. It was also confirmed that clean and uncut wood and wood packaging was permitted as bedding. One member said that the two key issues here were to establish what is permitted and get a clearer picture of what is actually happening on farms. Another member added that, provided that the products were safe, farmers should be applauded for recycling. Regarding next steps, it was

³ Annex A to CH/2009/3 refers.

⁴ In addition, pica occurs quite commonly in cattle and pica would increase the probability and probable amount of ash ingestion.

⁵ Details in CH/2009/3

suggested that the group focus in the first instance on paper sludge ash, look at the information the EA have and consider whether on the basis of this information, this material is suitable for use as bedding. This was agreed.

ACTION: FSA & EA

HANDLING ARRANGEMENTS RE: RESTRICTED DOCUMENTS⁶

17. The Secretary introduced this agenda item. He explained that in May HPA had raised an issue regarding the circulation of 'restricted' documents by e-mail to members of CHaIRS. HPA was not on the Government Secure Intranet (GSI) system and had flagged up a potential security issue.

18. The Secretary confirmed that the Agency has checked with its IT section and can confirm that, as far as FSA policy is concerned, restricted emails cannot be sent outside the GSI. They have advised that information can be sent via the postal services⁷. Alternatively data can be encrypted before sending. Restricted documents cannot be faxed. The Secretary said that besides HPA there were two other organisations represented on CHaIRS who were not on GSI, namely EA and HSL. It was confirmed that both HPA and EA would be looking into this issue further to ascertain whether there were any plans to roll-out GSI in the near future. In the meantime restricted documents would be sent out by post.

ACTION: HPA & EA

19. One member commented that careful consideration should always be given before a document was classified as restricted. This was noted. Another member said that it may be that the three departments in question had IT security arrangements that were either equivalent to or superior to GSI, in which case there would not be a problem. The Secretariat agreed to investigate further⁸.

ACTION: SECRETARIAT

AOB

20. Members had no items that they wished to raise under AOB. The Chair thanked members for attending and confirmed that the next CHaIRS meeting would be held via tele-conference on Wednesday 9 September 2009.

**CHaIRS Secretariat
July 2009**

⁶ At this point John Caseley took over as Chair of the meeting.

⁷ For post to OGDs and non-Government addresses, Agency advice is to use Royal Mail or an approved courier – the document should be in a single sealed envelope addressed to a named individual and marked "PERSONAL" or "ADDRESSEE ONLY".

⁸ The Secretariat will also contact HSL to check that they are content to receive 'restricted' documents via post