

COMMITTEE ON THE MEDICAL ASPECTS OF RADIATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT

109th meeting, Thursday 27th November 2014

Skipton House, London

Present	<i>Chairman:</i>	Professor Alex Elliott	
	<i>Members:</i>	Dr Jane Barrett Dr Paul Darragh Professor Wil Evans Dr Brenda Howard Professor Stephanie McKeown Professor Munira Kadhim Professor Peter Marsden Dr Mark Pearce Mr Ian Robinson Professor Richard Wakeford Professor Peter Warwick Professor Catharine West	
	<i>Assessors:</i>	DCLG DECC DH DHSSPS-NI EA FSA HSE NDA PHE SEPA SG WG	
	<i>Secretariat:</i>	Dr Emma Petty Ms Kim Stonell	(PHE) (PHE)

COMARE 109

OPENING ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman opened the 109th meeting and advised members of the private nature of the meeting and that papers should remain confidential. Members were asked to declare any interests during the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed the substitute assessors for FSA, DHSSPS-NI and WG.

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Professor Roger Taylor, Dr Tom Nunan and Dr Frank de Vocht. Apologies were also received from Dr Jill Meara (Secretariat) and the assessors for FSA, DHSSPS-NI, WG, ISD and MoD. The MoD assessor requested that members were informed that tier two assessors do not attend meetings if there is nothing of relevance on the agenda. MoD is a tier two assessor as it is not a regulator or involved in drafting policy or regulation on radiation contamination.

ITEM 1 Minutes of the 108th COMARE meeting

1.1 Corrections to the minutes were agreed by the committee.

[ACTION: Secretariat]

1.2 The PHE assessor was asked to report back at this meeting on whether more radon was present in shale gas as opposed to sea gas. Members were advised that information reviewed to date does not support a conclusion either way. It is likely that both sources, sea gas and shale gas, will have wide variations in radon concentration between individual extraction points. The PHE assessor provided information on radon levels in North Sea gas and international measurements of radon in shale gas. The Chairman thanked the PHE assessor for the update.

ITEM 2 Matters arising

i) COMARE matters, membership and website

2.1 The Chairman advised members that the committee still has vacancies for a clinical radiologist and a cancer geneticist. He will also step down as Chair at the end of March 2015, so there will be a vacancy for a Chair and a medical physicist. The DH assessor advised members that the advert for the Chair and member vacancies should be published before Christmas, with interviews in February 2015 for the Chair. Interviews for the remaining vacancies would follow.

2.2 The Chairman informed members that the committee pages had been transitioned onto Gov.uk and access to the old COMARE site is now redirected automatically. Minutes of the last two meetings are on the main page and with scanned copies of the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th reports now available.

2.3 The Chairman reminded members that it was agreed the Chairman would raise the issues surrounding allowances and expenses for committee members at the GCSA meetings. As it was not possible to do so at the last two meetings, the Chairman wrote to Dame Sally Davies on the issue, noting the concerns relating to the independence and integrity of the committee. Members agreed that there was little to be gained from pursuing this issue further. The Chairman reiterated that it was for each individual member to decide their position on claiming remuneration.

2.4 The Chairman reminded members that in order to finalise COMARE 17, the committee was seeking funds from DH to undertake two additional studies. The DH assessor was pleased to confirm that funding had been secured to allow completion of both areas of work. The Chairman thanked DH and advised members that this work would be taken forward promptly.

2.5 The Chairman raised the issue of the committee's expenditure and the resources available to the committee. The Chairman is keen for his successor to be clear regarding funding and commissioning small areas of research, and has asked DH to clarify the position.

[ACTION: DH]

2.6 The Chairman drew members' attention to the Government Office for Science paper, 'Scientific advice to government: legal liability'. Members discussed whether insurance and indemnity was required for retired members and whether the provision by DH for current members should be expanded on the basis that the committee provides advice to the UK government and DAs. Members also noted that a government body, where previously indemnified, can now be sued and can countersue its employees. Members agreed that the Chairman would write to DH, copied to the DA representatives, seeking clarification on their view for indemnity.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

CCRG

2.7 The Chairman advised members that he had received an email from PHE approving the data transfer with the University of Oxford to transfer all of CCRG's data to the national database. Progress is being made with PHE for the release of the thyroid cancer data for COMARE 17.

ITEM 3 Working group reports

i) Contaminations Working Group

3.1 The Chairman drew members' attention to the particle updates considered by the Contaminations Working Group.

3.2 Professor Warwick declared an interest.

Sellafield

3.3 The EA assessor provided members with a brief summary of the report circulated to the CWG. In May 2014 Sellafield Ltd commissioned the Synergy2 system with improved alarms specifically for Am-241 and Sr-90, which has led to an increase in the number of finds detected. The detection system also detected an unusual beta-rich particle on Seascale beach in June. Characterisation of the particle is on-going.

3.4 Members were updated on the seabed monitoring programme, the optimisation of on-site particle characterisation and the workplan from the Sellafield Particles Group. The committee was advised that the proposed calibration test of the monitoring equipment would take place in January/February 2015 with the results expected in March 2015.

3.5 Members discussed the significance of the unusual find and its source, and requested that further information be provided to the CWG.

[ACTION: EA]

3.6 Members commented on the spread of particles along the beaches, particularly the more northerly ones. It was noted that one consideration for this was the improved detection system. The risk is still determined to be low, therefore monitoring would not be undertaken further afield at the present time. The focus is on whether there is a cache offshore. It is unlikely this would be determined for alpha particles, but it may be possible for beta particles. Members were informed that there were no plans to look at the Dumfries and Galloway coast again.

3.7 Members were advised that SEPA was retaining a watching brief with regards to Sellafield. An update on SEPA's position would be given to the CWG.

[ACTION: SEPA]

3.8 Members discussed evidence of a possible cache and repopulation of particles. The Chairman noted a work stream set up to model the sea environment for particles. The EA assessor advised that this may form part of the current work plan, providing some underlying hydro-dynamic data.

3.9 The EA assessor confirmed that beach monitoring is carried out all year round except during Easter and August. The main effect on find rates is from storm events removing sediment from beaches and bringing particles onshore. Members discussed the analysis of storm events. The NDA assessor commented that Sellafeld Ltd had looked at storm events and concluded that it was a dynamic and difficult model to assess, but that from the data the risks were low. The NDA assessor would provide more information on this to the CWG.

[ACTION: NDA]

3.10 It was asked whether the back population could be calculated. The EA assessor advised that PHE has calculated the risk assessments for alpha and beta particles using those particles that have been detected. When more information is available for the Synergy2, the risk assessments could be reviewed.

3.11 Members suggested the approach should be to determine how much is from the cutting up of the old pipeline. EA is content that there are no current discharges of particles from the site. Further information on the dismantling of the pipelines would be provided to the CWG.

[ACTION: EA]

Downreay

3.12 Members were advised that SEPA is maintaining a watching brief. Contaminated particles continue to be detected in the normal range at Sandside. No particles have been detected on the extreme east and west beaches. Members were content to maintain a watching brief until 2015, when it will be possible to establish which hypothesis is correct regarding the offshore cache.

Dalgety Bay

3.13 The SEPA assessor reported that an environmental impact assessment has commenced. The monitoring programme is continuing and the demarcation remains in place. Background measurements are being undertaken. The local community is content with progress, but does not want to see further delays. The physical remediation work will commence in 2016. SEPA is content that there is sufficient time for the necessary detailed design and testing, through model building, if required. Members were advised that the number of finds had decreased slightly. It was agreed that the conceptual site model in COMARE 15 would appear to be correct.

3.14 Members were informed that the detailed strategy for remediation is being worked up such that all current restrictions can be removed. The committee noted that the last document from the MoD did not provide sufficient detail on the designs. The SEPA assessor advised that the long term solution will be that Fife Council will adopt the coastal armour and SEPA will include the monitoring programme within its routine programme.

3.15 The Chairman advised members that he attended a meeting hosted by Scottish Government in August to explore the recommendations from COMARE 15, in particular recommendation 6. Representatives from SEPA were also present. A formal response has subsequently been received from the Radioactive Waste and Nuclear Decommissioning Team within Scottish Government and would be circulated to members.

[ACTION: Secretariat]

3.16 The SEPA assessor noted that a contaminated land seminar was held by SEPA for all local authorities in Scotland setting out the appropriate level of investigation of potential sites. It proved very useful and a further seminar for planners is being considered.

3.17 Members questioned whether COMARE should consider registrations for sealed sources. The Chairman noted the largest number of sources were in radiotherapy departments, for which there are warranted inspectors and this was within HSE's remit.

3.18 The DECC assessor advised that in light of the recommendations from COMARE 15, DECC is considering what potential research or best practice is needed. Members were advised of considerations being made on the recommendations by the devolved authorities.

- 3.19 Members recalled that the MoD had been asked previously for a list of alienated sites and the response received had been deemed adequate by the MoD assessor. The issue of additional sites may be reviewed by the CWG in due course.

Authorisation Working Group

- 3.20 Professor Evans reported that since the last COMARE meeting the AWG had only responded to one consultation from SEPA, regarding an application by EDF Energy to vary the limitation and conditions of the Authorisations held for the disposal of radioactive waste at Torness and Hunterston B power stations. This would provide greater flexibility in the disposal of solid waste. The working group was content with the proposals, which were in line with SEPA's current practice.

ITEM 4 COMARE publications

i) COMARE – 12th Report

- *Review of the recommendations*

- 4.1 The Chairman referred to the conclusions and recommendations of COMARE 12 and the findings and recommendations of the DH Expert Group on 'Justification of CT for Individual Health Assessment'. The Scottish Government has asked COMARE for a view on whether the recommendations of the DH Expert Group should be regarded as superseding, where applicable, the relevant recommendations of COMARE 12, in particular, the recommendations regarding lung cancer screening.
- 4.2 The Chairman asked members to consider whether they were content to endorse the recommendations of the DH Expert Group in light of evidence that has come forward in the last 7 years. Members asked whether the UK National Screening Committee had a view. The DH assessor advised members that the UK NSC fully supports the recommendations and were consulted by the expert group.
- 4.3 Members briefly discussed the dose ranges used across different centres and the cancer referral criteria for a CT scan, but noted that the report was concerned with scanning asymptomatic people. The DH assessor added that the report is used as a reference by scanning companies and as a guide by enforcement officers. Following a brief discussion, members were content to endorse the recommendations of the DH Expert Group. The Chairman would write formally to Scottish Government, copied to DH and the DAs.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

DXA for Fitness and Sports Performance Assessment

- 4.4 Professor Evans raised the issue of the use of DXA for sports performance and fitness assessment. DXA scans were mentioned in Chapter 7 of COMARE 12, but their use has expanded since the report was written, with DXA now being used to assess fitness and performance in individuals engaged in sports, particularly at elite level, and more recently for body composition measurements. He added that IR(ME)R does not apply to the use of DXA for sports performance and fitness assessment. Members were asked to consider whether some form of regulation should be recommended for these practices, despite the relatively small radiation dose, and if so, what form the regulation should take and what action should be initiated by the committee.
- 4.5 Members were advised that DH has initiated a justification decision process for the use of DXA for sports performance assessments under Regulation 9 (3) of the Justification of Practices Involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004. Members briefly discussed GPs running this as a screening test for osteoporosis; however it was noted this is a medical practice and is carried out under IR(ME)R.
- 4.6 The Chairman advised members that DH has been considering this issue. The DH assessor noted that the term 'sports performance assessments' had been established to help refine what was being discussed and informed members on the work to date. Legal advisers for DH were reviewing the regulatory framework options. In depth discussions were underway and advice would be required from COMARE, not of a regulatory nature but on the available evidence, to help establish whether the practice is justified or not.

- 4.7 Members questioned why this was not considered an occupational health surveillance exposure; however the DH assessor advised that identifying the employer was difficult. These issues were being considered by the legal advisors. Members also felt that it was sensible to consider the breadth of the issue as other practices may need to be included.
- 4.8 The Chairman sought agreement from the DAs that they were content for DH to take this forward. It was questioned whether the use of DXA or ionising radiation was being considered. The DH assessor advised that it would be to regulate the use of ionising radiation in this practice. Under the new BSS Directive this practice will have to be included in the new regulations in 2018 under the use of non-medical exposures using radiological equipment. In principal, the DAs were content to wait for the outcome of legal opinion and asked to be kept informed of progress. Volunteers were sought for a COMARE subcommittee to consider the evidence.
- 4.9 The Chairman advised that Professor Evans would chair the subcommittee. Members wishing to volunteer were asked to contact the secretariat. The group should also include representation from DECC, DCMS, the Faculty of Sports Medicine and HSE. The secretariat confirmed that Dr de Vocht, Dr Pearce and Professor Kadhim had expressed an interest.

[ACTION: Members]

COMARE – 16th Report

- 4.10 The Chairman informed members that COMARE 16 was published on Thursday 14th August 2014 with a press briefing held at the Science Media Centre in London. The briefing was well attended.
- 4.11 The DH assessor informed members that Professor Erika Denton would chair the working group that will take the recommendations forward. The terms of reference are to interpret the COMARE recommendations into operational guidance for healthcare staff. The current intended publication date is early summer 2015.

ITEM 5 COMARE publications in progress

i) COMARE – 17th Report – Sellafield and Dounreay Review

- 5.1 Dr Pearce advised members that the main changes to the draft report relate to comments received from members. Chapter 5 has also been reworked by Dr Broom. In light of earlier comments, the additional analyses can now be taken forward.
- 5.2 One of the crucial chapters is based on the Bunch et al paper and members were asked to consider whether the published comments on the paper should be included in the report as a way to respond to arguments that could be raised. Members agreed to consider a pro-active rebuttal of potential arguments. Members discussed the conclusion in the Bunch et al paper that there is no evidence of any increased cancer risk later in life among those resident in the areas at birth and agreed that it should state 'at the current time'. Members discussed informing stakeholders of the potential arguments prior to publication.

[ACTION: SDRS]

- 5.3 The Chairman reminded members that the committee was required to decide at this meeting on whether to delay publication of the report to include the additional analyses or whether to publish the report in two parts. Members discussed the consequences of omitting the data and proceeding to publication, and agreed that publication of the report should be delayed pending completion of the two additional analyses.

[ACTION: SDRS]

- 5.4 Members briefly discussed the milk ban after the windscale fire.
- 5.5 The Chairman suggested that approximately 12 weeks be allowed for the completion of the analyses for the report, with a final draft in April/May 2015. Formal publication was likely to be in the latter half of 2015. The Chairman added that there was no further news on the schools cohort. The publication plan with regards to stakeholders was also discussed.

5.6 The Chairman thanked Dr Broom for redrafting Chapter 5.

ii) **COMARE – 18th Report – Interventional Radiology Review**

5.7 The Chairman advised members that the second meeting of the subcommittee took place on 16th July 2014. Author agreement was reached at the meeting. There was still a requirement for an interventional cardiologist, an interventional neurologist and paediatric cardiologist to be co-opted onto the subcommittee. Members were asked to suggest potential candidates if possible. The next meeting of the group would likely take place in January 2015.

[ACTION: Members]

5.8 At the last meeting, it was determined that from a list of 26 subgroups of interventional radiology procedures PHE had data on only two of those. The NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board was approached for dose data, but had felt unable to assist the subcommittee with data due to constraints imposed by Scottish Government. Other avenues for such data needed to be considered. Members are asked to submit any suggestions for obtaining dosimetry data to the secretariat. Dr Pearce agreed to forward data from a literature review for consideration.

[ACTION: Members]

[ACTION: Dr Pearce]

ITEM 6 Any other business

6.1 Members noted that the date for the November 2015 meeting clashes with a two-day EU scientific seminar. The week prior to this is the MELODI annual meeting. The secretariat would check for alternative dates.

[ACTION: Secretariat]

6.2 The Chairman reminded members that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 18th March 2015 at Skipton House. He closed the meeting at 2.25 pm.