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Advisory Committee on Dangerous Substances (ACDS)

Summary of Open meeting on Monday 22 November 2004 at the Palace Hotel, Manchester

Background

1 The third open meeting of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Substances (ACDS) was held in response to the Health and Safety Commission's (HSC) policy of more open government, and its commitment to holding meetings which are open to the general public, and encouraging its Advisory Committees to hold a minimum of one open meeting each year.

Who attended

2 The event, which was chaired by Nick Starling, HSE's Co-Director of Policy Group, (who also chairs ACDS) was publicised on HSE's website, and was attended by a dozen members of the public, members of ACDS, and relevant HSE staff.

Why it was held?

3 The purpose of the meeting was to allow members of the public the opportunity to find out how the committee operates and the type of work it handles, and to discuss any related issues/concerns with members of ACDS and the relevant HSE officials. The agenda was posted on the HSE website, and attendees received an information note on the committee - reproduced below.

What was it about?

4 The first session consisted of several brief presentations by members and officials, including:

- HSE's Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety to 2010 and beyond, and its impact on the work of ACDS;
- how HSE had attained its current objectives and principles in land use planning, and how it intended to progress them;
- progress on Chemical Essentials, a joint project involving ACDS and Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances in preparing an integrated electronic system which covers health safety and the environment, and tells people what they have to do to comply with the law;
- the current position on the project to update the Explosives Act of 1875 and replace it with a new set of regulations on the manufacture and storage of explosives; and

- an Explosive Inspector's views on identifying and managing hazards and implementing dangerous substances legislation.

What issues were raised?

5 The final session provided the audience with the opportunity to ask HSE officials and/or members of ACDS questions. Issues raised included:

- A query about the type of chemicals that will be included in the Chemical Essentials database, and how the commercial in confidence aspect of products would be handled? In response, it was acknowledged that this could be a fairly significant issue, and it will need further consideration under Phase 2 of this project. The Chemical Essentials Working Group considered that the CHIP approved supply list (ASL) - an available database - could be used as the initial database; however, the WG now recognises that the Chemical Essentials database would be greatly enhanced by the inclusion of synonyms and trivial names for chemicals.
- A query about whether funding for the Chemical Essentials project had been subject to a cost benefit analysis. In response, it was pointed out that the participating groups consider that there is a significant benefit from Chemical Essentials getting information about chemicals out to a much wider audience and getting a higher compliance level. However, the Chemical Essentials project was considered particularly complex as far as cost benefit analysis was concerned, as it involved HSE; the Environment Agency; the TUC; CBI; local authorities, DTI; and small businesses - each with their own different perspective on cost benefits.
- Concerns about security aspects/issues around the control and transportation of explosives. In response, it was pointed out that the Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment Regulations 2004, which deal primarily with classification of dangerous substances for transport, ensuring that goods are correctly packaged and that vehicles placarded in case of an incident, include some security requirements. Proposals for more specific security requirements to protect vehicles from attack, such as tracker devices, were being discussed in terms of European-wide legislation.
- A query about whether there was any pending legislation or existing legislation on the control of land use around ports. In response, it was pointed out that whilst Seveso 2 covers some ports which are COMAH establishments, it does not cover intermediate temporary storage where material is passing through. However, although HSE has been aware for some time that the EC wishes to regulate such areas, no proposals have been produced at this stage.
- A query about whether ACDS intended to review earlier work undertaken on the transport of hazardous material in the light of increased use of just in time deliveries of dangerous substance. In response, HSE confirmed that there are no plans for ACDS review this work in the future, because, HSE no longer has the policy lead on such issues, having, earlier this year, handed policy responsibility for the transport of dangerous goods back to the Department for Transport.

6 A copy of the transcript of the meeting is available on request.

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