

**Open Government status:** Partially open

**Paper Number:** ACTS/06/2003

**Exempt material:** The public version of this paper will have exempt material removed from paragraph 6. The section is withheld under Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information – ‘information that would cause unwarranted invasion of personal privacy’.

**Meeting Date:** 13 March 2003

**Type of Paper:** Above the line

**Intranet embargo:** No

**HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES**

**ACTS Open Meeting**

**A Paper by Acts Secretariat**

**Cleared by John Thompson**

**Issue**

1. Approval is sought on the timing, format and organisation of the first ACTS open meeting.

**Timing**

2. It is proposed to hold the first ACTS open meeting on Friday 17 October 2003 during European Week for Safety and Health 2003 - of which the theme this year is “prevention of risks caused by dangerous substances” (see paper ACTS/09/2003). An October date has the benefit of giving the reconstituted Committee an opportunity to settle in at the 10 July meeting, so ensuring the open meeting will not be the inaugural meeting for any new members.

**Recommendation**

3. Members are asked to consider and endorse the proposals set out in paragraphs 8 to 19, and agree actions set out in paragraphs 31 to 35.

**Background**

4. One of the requirements of the Government’s *Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees* (DTI, Dec. 2001) is that committees hold open meetings on a regular basis, so as to provide opportunity for direct public access. The Commission has agreed that advisory committees (ACs) should hold at least one open meeting a year. The Commission has also said that further meetings in public should be held where it

would be a useful means of consultation or it would help the public have a greater understanding of the work of the AC. To date, ACTS has not held an open meeting.

5. At the November 2002 meeting it was agreed that ACTS would hold its first open meeting during 2003. Four members → ← **This section is being withheld under Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information** volunteered to assist Secretariat in deciding how the open meeting should be handled. These members and the Secretariat met on 16 December. Prior to the meeting Secretariat contacted a number of other Subject Advisory Committees (SACs) and Industry Advisory Committees (IACs) to establish what approach, if any, they had taken and whether there were any lessons that had been learnt. Of the SACs, the Occupational Health Advisory Committee (OHAC) has not yet held an open meeting, though the Advisory Committee on Genetic Modification (ACGM), Advisory Committee on Dangerous Substances (ACDS) and Ionising Radiations Advisory Committee (IRAC) have all held at least one, and some two.
6. The approaches taken by different ACs differ widely. Some have simply held normal meetings, which are flagged as “open”, to which members of the public are invited (via articles in trade press, the HSE website etc.) to observe but not participate. Such approaches have generally had a poor uptake, but have the advantage of being relatively straightforward to organise whilst still meeting the obligations of the Code of Practice. A number of SACs have, for their first open meeting, put on special events specifically aimed at raising awareness concerning what the AC does and how it operates. These meetings generally take the format of Committee members making a series of presentations to the public attendees, allowing for adequate time for audience interaction/participation. Clearly with this approach there is no scope for carrying out normal AC business, and any pressing matters are usually dealt with in a “closed” session in the afternoon. This later approach has generally resulted in much greater uptake by the public (generally through targeted invitations/flyers sent directly to intermediaries, stakeholders, relevant trade associations etc.), though there are of course considerably greater resource and cost implications in staging such events. Once ACs have held a meeting of this second (presentation-style) type, they have then generally reverted to a policy for open meetings of simply holding normal meetings to which the public are invited.
7. The Commission has identified four criteria that need to be taken account of in planning open meetings, these are that:
  - a balance needs to be struck between transparency and the most effective operating methods for ACs (so where the nature of the business is sensitive or commercial in confidence, an open meeting would not been appropriate);
  - open meetings should be well advertised and should be held at a time and place that will encourage interested parties to attend;
  - advertising should be proportionate to the size and expenditure of the AC; and
  - in deciding on the location for an open meeting, consideration should be given to ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities.

## Argument

8. The following paragraphs represent the views and conclusions reached by the ACTS open meeting steering group on 16 December 2003.

### ***Why have an open meeting?***

9. Regular open meetings are a requirement of the *Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees*. The work and business of ACTS must be as transparent as possible, taking account of some of the sensitive issues sometimes involved. It was felt that an open meeting would be an excellent opportunity to explain to members of the public what ACTS does, as well as to provide a forum for direct feedback from the public. An open meeting could raise the profile of the Committee's new work plan, and its aim to stop people being made ill from exposure to substances at work. It would provide an interface with intermediaries who can help deliver the work plan.

### ***When should we hold the open meeting?***

10. It was agreed that with the theme of this years European Week for Safety and Health 2003 (w/c 13 October) being the prevention of risks caused by dangerous substances presented, this presented an opportunity to promote and raise the profile of ACTS. It was agreed to hold the meeting around, if not in, the European Week. The amended ACTS work plan undertakes to support and promote Euro Week. So, as well as promoting ACTS itself, the meeting can therefore be used by ACTS to promote Euro Week and the need to control risks arising from the use of chemicals in the workplace. The timing of the meeting will therefore meet two objectives - the Code of Practice requirement and the work plan.

### ***Where should the meeting be held?***

11. It is proposed to hold the open in meeting in London, at HSE's Rose Court office. The building is accessible for people with disabilities and relatively easy to reach. Using HSE premises will also avoid the additional costs that would be incurred by using a hotel or similar external venue. It is intended to use the Rose and Globe rooms for the meeting (removing the partition), making a room twice the size of the room usually used, with a capacity for approximately 90 people.

### ***Who should the meeting be aimed at, i.e. who is the target audience be?***

12. Members considered that it was vital to determine who constituted ACTS' public or target audience. Ideally the audience we aim at should be workers, consumers, taxpayers and industry (particularly SMEs). However steering group members felt it unrealistic to expect to get a big response from these groups; as many may not have heard of ACTS, it would be unlikely that they would want to attend an open meeting. It was therefore felt that the meeting should be aimed at those groups who are well placed to influence what goes on in the workplace, for example chemical manufacturers/suppliers (and their representative associations), trade associations, workers groups (e.g. trade unions), occupational hygienists, health and safety consultants/institutions, the insurance industry, Chambers of Commerce, and perhaps even other advisory committees (e.g. IACs and sub-groups of OHAC). Intermediaries are considered as being the most import target audience. A complete list of possible attendees can be found at Annex 1. ACTS members are invited to suggest other organisations that could be invited.

### ***What format should the meeting take?***

13. Members felt that the meeting should proceed on the basis of an open session in the morning and a brief normal (“closed”) meeting in the afternoon during which any pressing ACTS business could be covered. It was felt that the open session should consist of a series of joint ACTS/HSE (and perhaps HSC) presentations on:
- European Week for Safety and Health 2003;
  - What ACTS is (including its remit, aims and objectives), what it has done (e.g. limit setting) and what it intend to do in the future (i.e. the new work plan and HSE’s Chemicals Strategy);
  - A more in depth look at one specific issue – asthma is proposed; and
  - How can ACTS make a difference in the workplace (perhaps more of an interactive session)?
14. In keeping the event focused it will be necessary to concentrate, where possible, on the Commission’s Revitalising agenda. It is vital that adequate time is provided for attendees to ask questions and discuss matters of concern/interest.
15. The open meeting will be approximately 2 hours long, ending at lunchtime. Public attendees will be provided with refreshments when they arrive. It is hoped that a display will be able to be set-up in a waiting room, i.e. with display panels on Euro Week and the safe use of hazardous chemicals/substances in the workplace. Once the open meeting has ended, members felt it appropriate that HSE provided light lunch for the public attendees. This would allow informal interaction between Committee members and the public. Whether or not lunch can be provided will depend on the numbers involved and available budget. Members may wish to note that no other SACs have provided lunch for public attendees. One issue on this point being the matter of security, i.e. controlling public access to the rest of HSE’s premises, which could prove difficult during a buffet lunch.
16. The closed session of the meeting will then take place after lunch and after the public attendees have departed. As well as discussing/evaluating the morning open session, the meeting will be used to progress any outstanding ACTS business.

### ***Promotion of the meeting and handling prospective attendees***

17. Invitations will be sent to the organisations and intermediaries listed in Annex 1. Members of ACTS are also asked to promote the meeting through their own organisations and networks. An article will be placed in HSE’s newsletter, *Toxic Substances Bulletin* (TSB). The ACTS page on HSE’s website will also be used to promote the meeting. Links with other IACs and SACs can also be used to promote the meeting, the members of OHAC’s five programme action groups may be particularly useful contacts in this respect, e.g. British Occupational Hygiene Society, Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, Institute of Occupational Medicine, Royal College of Nurses (Occ. Health Branch), Association of Occupational Health Nurse Practitioners (AOHNP), Chemical Industries Association etc.

18. Via all these routes, anyone wishing to attend the meeting will be required to contact ACTS Secretariat, and provide details about themselves and who they represent, as well as where they heard about the meeting. This way we will know exactly how many people are coming, and who they are. It will not be possible for people to simply turn up on the day. Entrance will effectively be by ticket only. It will be necessary to plan on the basis of a maximum number of attendees, perhaps in the order of 40 – 60; though it should not be discounted that actual requests to attend could be well below or above this number.

### ***Strategy for subsequent open meetings***

19. The Commission expects ACs to hold at least one open meeting per year. Clearly the findings of the evaluation of the first meeting will impact on the strategy for future meetings. At this stage, it is proposed that subsequent open meetings are more akin to normal ACTS meetings, e.g. normal ACTS business is conducted but with the public being able to come and observe (but not contribute). Adverts would be placed on the ACTS website and in TSB to alert the public to the open meetings – which would again be by ticket only. Again, any sensitive business would be conducted in a closed session in the afternoon. The Committee needs to agree whether it wishes all future meeting to be conducted in this way, i.e. all meetings are “open” (several IACs have taken this approach), or whether it would prefer to set aside one meeting per year, perhaps the November one, as the open meeting.

### **Consultation**

20. Consultation has been carried out via the four ACTS members who volunteered to join the open meeting steering group (see paragraph 5).

### **Evaluation Plan**

21. An evaluation of the open meeting will be carried out to help plan future meetings. The most likely method will be via a questionnaire for attendees.

### **Relevant Control Systems**

22. Not applicable.

### **Presentation/Communication Plan**

23. Proposals for promoting and publicising the open meeting are set out in paragraphs 17 to 18.

### **Costs and Benefits (including Financial/Resource Implications for HSE)**

24. The costs of holding the open meeting will come out of the existing budget. A meeting of the type proposed will take considerable planning and organisation if it is to be a success – something confirmed by Secretariats of other ACs who have conducted such meetings. As well as demands on Secretariat, there will also be demands on those ACTS members making presentations at the meeting, e.g. in preparing presentations and liaising with Secretariat and other speakers to agree content and ensure that this is no repetition etc.

## **Environmental Implications**

25. None

## **European Implications**

26. None

## **Other Implications**

27. Holding the open meeting on 17 October would essentially mean that the meeting previously scheduled for 20 November is being brought forward a month (i.e. there would no longer be a November meeting of ACTS).

28. In the past some members have expressed reservations at having their names and organisation details placed on the website. Clearly, as part of the open meeting it will be necessary for all members to be identifiable, e.g. by name and who they represent. Consequently a move to open meetings may present an opportunity to review how we present information about members on the website. Members may have views on this matter.

29. The protocol operated by other ACs at their first open meeting has been to invite one or more members of the Commission to the meeting. This has the benefit of enabling a presentation on the Commission's perspective of ACTS.

## **Devolution**

30. The meeting will be open to attendees from England, Scotland and Wales. Depending on the number of attendees it may be necessary for ACTS to consider alternating future open meetings between the three countries, though this would have obvious cost implications.

## **Action**

31. Members are asked to agree:

- a) The time and venue for the first open meeting (see paragraphs 10 and 11)
- b) The format and handling of the meeting (paragraphs 13 to 18) and particularly the themes for the presentations (see bullet points in paragraph 13); and
- c) A strategy for holding open meetings in the future (paragraph 19).

32. Once the themes of the presentations have been agreed ((b) above), it will be necessary for members to consider who is going to make each presentation. Clearly the ongoing reconstitution of the Committee may have some impact on this. Early volunteers will be much appreciated.

33. Members are invited to suggest additional intermediaries and organisations that could be invited to the open meeting (see paragraphs 12 and 17 and particularly Annex 1).

34. The Committee is asked to agree that the steering group (paragraph 5) meets again to take forward the planning of the finer detail of the open meeting.

35. Finally, members should take note of the implications discussed in paragraphs 27 to 29 and comment as necessary.

## **Contact**

ACTS Secretariat  
Tel: 020 7717 6815

ACTS-06-2003

**Potential invitees/attendees to the ACTS open meeting**

**1. Trade Associations (connected to the chemicals industry):**

- British Adhesive & Sealants Association
- British Aerosol Manufacturers Association
- British Association for Chemical Specialities
- British Chemical Distributors & Trades Association
- British Chemical Engineering Contractors Association
- British Coatings Federation Ltd
- British Colour Manufacturers' Association
- British Compressed Gases Association
- British Fragrance/Essence Manufacturers' Association
- British Imaging & Photographic Association
- British Plastics Federation
- British Polyolefin Textiles Association
- British Pyrotechnists Association
- Chemical Industries Association (CIA)
- Composites Processing Association
- Chemical Recycling
- (The) Cosmetic Toiletry & Perfumery Association Ltd
- Dyestuffs Sector Group
- National Sulphuric Acid Association Ltd (affiliated to the CIA)
- UK Cleaning Products Industry Association
- The Society of Chemical Industry
- Society of Dyer & Colourists
- Solvent Industry Association (affiliated to the CIA)
- Specialised Organics Chemicals Sector Association (part of CIA)

**2. Other business/worker organisations:**

- Trade Unions
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
- Federation of Small Business
- Local Government Association
- *Are members aware of other potential invitees in this category?*

**3. Professional Bodies/Research Bodies/Charities:**

- RoSPA
- British Safety Council
- Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH)
- IOM
- Institute for Environment & Health (IEH)
- BOHS
- Association of Occupational Health Nurse Practitioners (AOHNP)
- Royal College of Nursing (Occ. Health Branch)
- *Any others?*

**4. Other Commission ACs:**

- Occupational Health Advisory Committee (OHAC)
  - Plus the 5 OHAC Programme Action Groups: Compliance; Knowledge; Skills; Support; Continuous Improvement

**Note: Members are invited to suggest any other potential organisations they know**