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## HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

### ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES

**Chemical Essentials: Joint HSE/ Environment Agency project to develop integrated health, safety and environmental advice on working safely with chemicals**

**A paper by Chris Williams**

**Cleared by John Thompson on 24 February 2003**

#### **Issue**

1 The development of an Internet based guidance package for small firms which provides integrated advice on how to control the health, safety and environmental risks from chemicals used in the workplace.

#### **Timing**

2 Routine

#### **Recommendation**

3 That ACTS note progress with the project.

#### **Background**

4 HSE and the Environment Agency are working together to develop an interactive electronic risk assessment tool that provides practical advice on controlling the health, safety and environmental risks from chemicals in the workplace. The HSE guidance *COSHH Essentials: easy steps to controlling chemicals* will be built into the new system. Members will be aware of *COSHH Essentials*, which provides a risk assessment scheme that leads the user to advice on controlling the health risks from chemicals. There will also be strong links to the Environment Agency's NetRegs tool – a comprehensive legal signposting system combined with best practice environmental advice on an industry sector basis.

#### *Development Work*

5 There are two main phases to the project. First is the development of the risk assessment framework. This will set out the pathways and take the user from the

basic information that they input to the integrated control advice relevant to their chemical task. Once the rules and pathways for generating the guidance have been established the actual output guidance needs to be written, in a straightforward, practically focussed and user friendly fashion.

6 Funding for this phase of the project was received from the Treasury's Invest to Save Budget. The Invest to Save Budget exists to support projects that involve two or more public bodies working together to deliver services that are innovative, joined up, locally responsive and more efficient. It is anticipated that this phase of the project will be completed by Sept 2003.

7 The second main phase of the project is the conversion of the risk assessment framework into an IT system. This will be a major project in itself and will require additional funding.

### *Project Management and Consultation*

8 As the project is a joint HSE/Environment Agency project a cross government Project Board has been set up which has overall responsibility for delivery of the project. This includes representatives from SEPA (Scottish Environment Protection Agency) and DTI SBS (Small Business Service).

9 One of the key factors in the success of the *COSHH Essentials* was the close involvement of stakeholders at all stages. ACTS will be aware that a joint ACDS/ACTS subgroup was set up in 2002 to harness stakeholder input and expertise for this project. The Subgroup covers health, safety and environmental issues. Many members have expertise in all three areas, but there will also be a specific Environment Agency nominee.

10 The membership of the ACDS/ACTS subgroup is detailed in the Annex

### **Argument**

11 Work on developing the system rules and pathways is well underway. High-level pathways for how the system will generate guidance have been established. The ACDS/ACTS subgroup has met twice, once in July 2002 and again in November 2002. The subgroup has:

- identified that the minimum information the system needs to carry out the risk assessment process is information on:
  - the chemical or product, (hazard data- Risk Phrase, UN no, chemical name/CAS/EC no, and physical/chemical properties - BP, VP, FP & state) via:
    - the safety data sheet or
    - a database
  - task/process
  - amount used and stored on site.

In order to minimise what the user has to input we intend that *Chemical Essentials* is supported by a **chemical database**. This will hold much of the hazard information for individual chemicals.

- examined and given support for the high-level system pathways
- held a specialist workshop on 11 February 2003 to look into the safety scheme in more detail. A scheme was agreed for establishing safety control advice, taking into account scale of use and operating temperature and an approach to deal with chemical reaction hazards. This needs to be further developed and peer reviewed.
- set up a specialist workshop for 20 March 2003 to look in more detail at the environment scheme.

12 Much work is still needed on setting down the detailed system rules, working through the detailed pathways and interdependencies of the system.

13 A discussion document setting out the risk assessment framework, will be published in summer 2003. This will contain the scope of the system, the rules the system will use to generate the advice and the type of advice the system will produce. Stakeholders will be closely involved in the production of the document, which will be published for wider consultation.

14 The discussion document will be accompanied by a high profile publicity event in September 2003, which will set out the aims and proposals for the system. Worked examples and mock up screens will be presented at the seminar to illustrate how the system will work and the type of guidance it will produce.

#### *Funding*

15 HSE and the Environment Agency are investigating sources of funding for Phase 2 of the project; ie conversion of the risk assessment framework into an IT system. If funding is secured, phase 2 of the project is scheduled to begin in April 2004. This phase is expected to take 2 years.

#### **Communication Plan**

16 See paragraphs 13 and 14 above.

#### **Evaluation Plan**

17 The current project to develop the technical basis (risk assessment framework) for the system has the following evaluation criteria: that a risk assessment framework is produced that is technically robust, has stakeholder support and provides simple practical integrated advice.

18 The final Internet based product, which goes beyond the current ISB funding, will require a combination of increased awareness and increased compliance as well as a robust/reliable system. The overall success indicator is the production of a viable product.

#### **Relevant Control Systems**

19 N/A

### **Consultation**

20 Constant stakeholder involvement is essential.

### **Presentation**

21 N/A

### **Costs and Benefits**

22 So far covered by ISB but there are further costs for Phase 2.

### **Environmental implications**

23 As the system is looking to incorporate environmental advice into the system, it should therefore have a positive impact on the environment, helping to avoid pollution incidents and minimising emissions to the environment.

### **European implications**

24 We will seek to interest European partners.

### **Devolution**

25 The system will be GB wide.

### **Other implications**

26 None

### **Action**

27 ACTS are invited to note the progress with the project.

### **Contact**

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**ACDS/ACTS Chemical Essentials Subgroup  
Membership**

CBI nominees	Martin Newall, Bayer Crop Science Chris Beaton, Acordis Nigel Dibben, Escond
TUC nominees	Liz Jenkins, Prospect Alastair Hay, Leeds University Alun Owen UK Transco
LA	Barbara Mawer, Warrington LA
Independents	Tony Cox, Safety Craft Risk Management Gordon Walker, Staffordshire University Richard Jones, IOSH
Environment Agency nominee	TBA
BOHS	Steve Bailey, GSK
Chair	John Thompson, HDC
Secretary	Chris Williams, HDC
Minutes secretary	Shona Picken HDC
HSE attendees	Craig Bell, SPD Keith Wilson, TD Paul Evans, TD Michael Topping, HDC
EA attendees	Jo Kennedy Chemicals Policy David Brodie Chemicals Policy