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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES

Report from WATCH

This report informs ACTS of the business conducted by WATCH at its meeting on 24 January 2003.

1. Tetrabromobisphenol A:

This substance (TBBP-A) is the sixteenth (and last) substance for which the UK Competent Authority (HSE and EA) is acting as rapporteur under the Existing Substances Regulation. In accordance with previously agreed procedures WATCH was given the opportunity to peer review the draft risk assessment document (the occupationally relevant parts) en route to its entry into EU-wide consideration. WATCH endorsed HSE's presentation of the data and the overall conclusions reached based on that data. However, WATCH expressed concern that the toxicological profile of TBBP-A had been derived almost exclusively from studies in the rat. It has not been established that the rat is an appropriate experimental model for human responsiveness to this substance; in the rat there is very little systemic exposure to TBBP-A following oral dosing owing to extensive first-pass metabolism and there are no data to indicate if this is also the situation in humans. WATCH recommended that if the future use of TBBP-A is expanded, information on systemic bioavailability in humans should be sought. WATCH also expressed concern about the apparent poor standards of hygiene control in one UK workplace using TBBP-A. WATCH agreed that at present it was appropriate not to pursue the development of specified regulatory occupational risk management measures. Some suggestions were made for ways in which standards of workplace control could be secured. These included verifying that appropriate control advice was being promulgated on the supplier's safety data sheet.

2. Dealing with toxicological uncertainty

The context for this work has been described in previous Reports from WATCH (see for example ACTS/54/2002 and ACTS/13/2002) and therefore will not be repeated here. At the January 2003 meeting WATCH divided into three syndicate groups and discussed a proposed approach, backed by six

worked examples, to thinking through and documenting how different elements of toxicological uncertainty should be handled in considerations of occupational risk assessment and standard-setting for risk management. WATCH agreed that there was a need for greater transparency in explaining the basis for the decisions that were taken in relation to occupational risk assessment and standard-setting, along the lines proposed by Alan Moses, the WATCH member leading this project. There are various possibilities for how this commitment can now be reflected and taken further forward, some of which are dependent on the outcome of the discussions on the future of/successor to WATCH (item 3 on this ACTS agenda).

3. Open discussion of considerations regarding the future arrangements for the provision of scientific/technical advice on chemicals and occupational health.

John Thompson from HSE outlined the current direction of thinking within HSE on this issue; item 3 on this ACTS agenda reflects the current status of this activity. Following this introduction approximately 30 mins of time was available during which most WATCH members took the opportunity to air their personal opinions of some of the issues involved. These views were captured in the draft minutes of the January WATCH meeting, the relevant extract of which has been made available to ACTS, and are not repeated here. WATCH members have been sent the ACTS paper appearing at item 3 on this March agenda so that they can see the current position and proposals being put to ACTS.

4. Nitroglycols BMGV

This item was a follow-up to the discussions of WATCH on nitroglycols in May 1998, when it was recommended that a Biological Monitoring Guidance Value (BMGV) was appropriate for at least some members of this class of substances. At the January 2003 meeting, WATCH considered that nitroglycerin met the criteria for the establishment of a Benchmark BMGV based on measurement of total urinary nitroglycols. A Benchmark BMGV value of 15 micromol/mol creatinine was recommended. However, WATCH considered that there is clearly the potential for adverse health effects – headaches and underlying cardiovascular changes – in some individuals with total urinary nitroglycol concentrations of this magnitude. WATCH urged that employers should look again at the control measures that they currently have in place (currently considered to represent “good occupational hygiene practice”) to try to identify additional measures that would further reduce exposures. WATCH considered that the available data for propylene glycol dinitrate were insufficient to establish a BMGV and that the current uses for ethylene glycol dinitrate are such that this nitroglycol does not at present meet the criteria for establishing a BMGV.

5. Chromium (VI) BMGV

Again this item followed up a previous discussion at WATCH (September 1999) of the ESR risk assessment of 5 hexavalent chromium compounds, at

which time WATCH agreed that chromium (VI) met the criteria for a Benchmark BMGV. At the January 2003 meeting, WATCH recommended a Benchmark BMGV for chromium (VI) of 10 micromol chromium/mol creatinine based on measurements in post-shift urine.

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Finally, in the context of what is proposed to have been the last meeting of WATCH, a few words from the Chair. In recent years WATCH has tackled and developed robust positions on a substantial number and range of challenging and important scientific/technical issues in the chemicals field. To name a few: the “Asthmagen?” Compendium; glutaraldehyde and potential glutaraldehyde substitutes; the carcinogenicity classification of refractory ceramic fibres; flour dust; medium-density fibreboard (MDF); the putative trichloroethylene substitutes (in metal degreasing) bromochloromethane and n-propyl bromide; the fibrogenicity, carcinogenicity and potency variability of respirable crystalline silica; the evidence for Chronic Toxic Encephalopathy (CTE) and for observational evidence of an underlying neurological lesion. WATCH positions have never failed to withstand external publication and challenge and have been well received and influential when submitted to DG Emp/SCOEL – naphthalene, nitrogen monoxide, respirable crystalline silica, methyl iodide, etc. The membership has changed gradually over the years but the immense commitment of members has not and, from an HSE standpoint, has always been impressive and rewarding. As WATCH chairman and on behalf of HSE, I would like to thank all WATCH members, past and present, for the enormous contribution they have made in invariably establishing a strong scientific/technical basis for regulatory decision-making in the field of industrial chemicals and occupational health. ACTS has been extremely well served by WATCH.

**STEVE FAIRHURST
WATCH CHAIRMAN
February 2003**