

Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances Paper		ACTS/06/2012	
Meeting date:	13 November 2012	Open Govt. Status:	(open)
Type of paper:	for information	File Ref:	2012/385000
Exemptions:	(usually none)		

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES

Short report from WATCH meeting 20 June 2012

A paper by Jayne Wilder

The 23rd meeting of WATCH took place on 20 June 2012.

EU Carcinogens and mutagens directive

WATCH continued its ongoing consideration of bundles of substances and associated documentation in the context of the EU Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive (CMD). Focus was placed on both the genuine potential benefits of a binding exposure limit and the ease with which such a limit could be agreed and put in place relatively quickly for each of the substances under consideration for possible inclusion.

i. Diesel engine exhaust emissions (DEE)

This substance would be quite difficult to advance as a binding OEL under the amendment to the CMD. First there was a need to determine how to best express limit (elemental carbon or carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide). Only when this is determined can numerical values then be discussed. This is an important substance as large numbers of people are exposed to what has recently been concluded is an IARC category 1 carcinogen. If a limit was to be set it would need to be at a level where there would be a real societal benefit in achieving control to it. It seemed pointless to expend the effort to resolve questions about measures and levels unless real benefit would be delivered as a result of introducing the binding limit and securing compliance. Added complications are that trends and patterns of exposure are variable across sectors and work types. On-going technological changes may well deliver near-future improvements.

ii. Benzo(a)pyrene

Benzo(a)pyrene could be a useful marker of exposure to carcinogenic PAHs but care was needed in determining when it was an appropriate marker. If used as a marker there will potentially need to be different calculations made, depending upon the content of total PAHs involved in the exposure. Any binding OEL should be at a level whereby compliance would deliver a health benefit - the level proposed in this document would not be low enough and EU agreement on it would therefore serve only cosmetic purposes.

iii. Mineral oils (used engine oils), MDA

Members agreed that an OEL was not appropriate. However, they also considered that there was no point in seeking to measure skin exposure, as advocated by the SHEcan report; the critical exposure is not just about the level of any particular exposure, but also related to frequency of exposure. Measuring skin exposure accurately is notoriously difficult. Members also considered that, whilst it is true that good personal hygiene and appropriate PPE are important, the best option to eradicating significant skin exposure is an engineering solution to remove the necessity for manual involvement.

iv. Vinyl chloride monomer

WATCH considered that the IOM SHEcan report was agreed to be a reasonable current assessment of the position. Members noted that it appears that the exposure data are not normally distributed, so there would need to be further investigation of the statistics if it was concluded appropriate to pursue a decrease in the current binding limit from 3ppm to the lower of the other two options presented, i.e. 1ppm.

v. 1, 3 Butadiene

WATCH members considered that the main purpose of setting an OEL should be to establish a benchmark to prevent any potential future relaxation of control leading to increases in exposure.

vi. Bromoethylene (vinyl bromide)

The Chairman summed up the view of WATCH that the absence of exposure information was problematic. If a limit was set it should be low enough such that compliance with it would bring about an enhancement of working conditions. In relation to comparisons with vinyl chloride, it would appear anomalous to have a higher limit for the more potent substance, so transparency in explaining the positions for vinyl chloride and vinyl bromide would be essential.

vii. 2-Nitropropane

Members judged that securing agreement with the proposal might be easy, but the OEL value would not contribute to health protection and would therefore be of cosmetic value only.

viii. 4,4-Methylenedianiline (MDA)

The Chairman summed up the views of members that MDA is not a good candidate for consideration of a binding airborne limit under the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive, as the major problem is the potential for uptake via skin exposure; there is a lack of current information about the potential for exposure via this route.

Solvent Red 164

It was confirmed that the possible metabolites of substance actually supplied as solvent red 164 are compatible with those included in the biological monitoring done in the HSE/HSL worker monitoring study. The results of this study are therefore reassuring.

The supplier will request the BINDT to build on the HSE/HSL work, liaising with an appropriate laboratory to test for o-toluidine and other metabolites in more samples from potentially exposed workers.

New Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees

Whilst many of the features of WATCH remain in line with the revised code of practice, there are some points in the code where current WATCH practices might need to be updated.

i. Terms of reference:

Members agreed that as WATCH remained a sub-committee of ACTS, an updated draft 'terms of reference' should be agreed.

ii. Openness:

Members discussed the practicality of holding meetings in open session. Accommodation is limited. In principle members wished to be as open as possible as they felt this was a valuable statement of the members' confidence in each other. However, it was acknowledged that open discussion of some issues in public poses some difficulties, e.g. details of animal experimentation. Members agreed to seek advice from ACTS about the possibility of holding an open meeting, perhaps starting with the notion of one meeting a year held in open session.

iii. Annual report:

At present WATCH does not publish an annual report, as WATCH is a subgroup of ACTS. However members agreed that it would be useful to produce a short annual report to supplement the published records of meetings.