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## **ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES**

### **Annual report on the work of the ACTS Communications Working Group (CoWG)**

#### **A Paper by ACTS Secretariat**

**Cleared by Carole Sullivan on 12 March 2004**

#### **Issue**

1. Annual report to ACTS members on the activities of the Communications Working Group (CoWG).

#### **Timing**

2. Routine.

#### **Recommendation**

3. That ACTS takes note of the recent activity of this Working Group.
4. That ACTS agrees to bring the work of CoWG to a close by way of an amalgamation with HSE's recently established Chemical Risk Communication Community of Practice and Interest (COPI). It is proposed that the existing six CoWG members (see [Annex 1](#)) become external members of the COPI, reporting back to ACTS as and when necessary in the same way CoWG would have done.

#### **Background**

5. At the July 2003 meeting of ACTS, members expressed some concern that they did not receive regular reports from all the ACTS sub-committees. ACTS Secretariat agreed that an annual report from all sub-committees would henceforth be provided at each March ACTS meeting.
6. The Committee last considered a paper from CoWG in March 2002 (ACTS/07/2002). CoWG was originally established to consider how ACTS could develop activity in support of Securing Health Together and Revitalising Health and Safety. Additionally,

following a presentation to ACTS in July 2001 about the 3Rs project on communication (getting the Right message to the Right people at the Right time), the Working Group was asked to consider how the findings from the 3Rs work might be taken forward in respect of communicating messages about toxic substances at work.

7. In March 2002 ACTS agreed the terms of reference for CoWG. These being:

*“To advise ACTS on initiatives to support HSC's Strategic Plan in respect of controlling ill-health effects arising from exposure to toxic substances in the workplace. In particular to facilitate the development of proposals and initiatives for the targeted communication of messages on chemical safety to key groups.”*

## **Argument**

8. Since March 2002 the Working Group has had just one meeting, this was held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2004. The reason for this period of inactivity being that it was considered appropriate to suspend the work of CoWG during the development of the new ACTS work plan and the subsequent reconstitution of the Committee. The current membership of the Working Group is listed in [Annex 1](#) of this paper.
9. At the recent CoWG meeting the new HSC/E Communications Strategy (paper HSC/04/32) was distributed and described to the Group. Any future communication initiatives on toxic substances will need to be in line with this strategy. The Group made some useful comments on the strategy that will be forwarded to HSE's Communications Directorate. A paper on HSE's new Chemical Risk Communication Community of Practice and Interest (COPI) was also distributed to the Working Group (reference CoWG/04/2004, reproduced as see [Annex 2](#) to this paper).
10. The Chemical Risk Communication COPI was formed in May 2003, with the aim of creating an HSE network for the sharing of best practice, research evidence and operational experience relating to communication tools and strategies. The COPI provides an effective mechanism for sharing knowledge and experience about chemical risk communication and education and acts as a resource which can be drawn upon by programme coordinators in developing communication tools. Just as with CoWG, the COPI's work programme builds on the findings of the 3Rs (Right Information, Right People, Right Way) research programme and more recent research on communication tools for reaching small firms and the public. In other words the COPI has a virtually identical role to CoWG (except one is an HSE Community, the other an ACTS sub group).
11. There was some discussion about potential duplication of future chemicals communication work carried out by CoWG, the COPI and HSE's Communications Directorate. Members therefore debated whether there is still a business need for CoWG. Following a consultation exercise that took place after the 12<sup>th</sup> February meeting, it was agreed that the two committees should amalgamate, with CoWG ceasing to exist as an ACTS sub group. The six existing members all indicated they are content to become members of the COPI instead.
12. The projects that the COPI is working on are essentially those considered by CoWG in February. Whilst membership of the COPI is currently made up of purely HSE staff, participation by external experts (who have an important peer review role) is very much

encouraged. The COPI was already actively seeking suggestions for external expert members. The proposed solution there appears to meet the needs of both groups.

13. At the meeting on 12 February other agenda items considered by CoWG included:

- A review of draft HSE *Guidelines for Communicating Advice on Chemical Health Risks and Controls* (paper CoWG/02/2004) which were very well received by members;
- Chemical hazard alert notices (CHANs) – e.g. improvements to style, format and content as well as a discussion on ways consultation, circulation and penetration can be improved (CoWG/03/2004);
- Proposals for a new hazardous substances home page on HSE's website (taking forward ideas discussed at ACTS in July 2003);
- Discussion on what should be in the research specification for an occupational asthma behavioural change project;
- Hearing about and reviewing the *Asthmagens in agriculture project* - a prototype electronic training tool being developed for the agricultural industry;
- Updates on *electronic-COSHH Essentials* (progress and promotion etc.); and
- An ongoing HSE funded project to find out what tools SMEs need to protect their workers from risks from working with hazardous substances.

#### **Communication Plan**

14. Not applicable.

#### **Evaluation Plan**

15. The outcomes and outputs of any work carried out by CoWG will be fully evaluated. Should ACTS agree that CoWG be amalgamated with the COPI (paragraph 24), the outputs of the COPI will also be evaluated.

#### **Relevant Control Systems**

16. Not applicable.

#### **Consultation**

17. CoWG members have been consulted on the proposed amalgamation with HSE's Chemical Risk COPI. Those members who responded expressed unanimous support for the proposal. The Chair of the COPI (Len Morris of HSE's Chemical Risk Control Corporate Topic Group), who attended the 12<sup>th</sup> February CoWG meeting, has also been consulted. He too fully supports the merger of the two groups.

#### **Presentation**

18. Not applicable.

## **Costs and benefits**

19. It is proposed that CoWG amalgamates with HSE's Chemical Risk COPI. For CoWG members, the time and commitment needed would be no different to continuing with CoWG. The COPI undertakes much of its work by electronic correspondence and has no more than two meetings each year. Combining the two groups will result in a more efficient, effective and creative chemical risk communication body at the same time as resulting in considerable cost and resource savings for HSE.

## **Environmental implications**

20. Not applicable.

## **European implications**

21. Not applicable.

## **Devolution**

22. Not applicable.

## **Other implications**

23. Not applicable.

## **Action**

24. ACTS members are asked to note the information provided in this paper and to agree to bring the work of CoWG to a close through an amalgamation with HSE's recently established Chemical Risk Communication COPI.

## **Contact**

ACTS Secretariat  
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**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
Communications Working Group**

**Membership:**

<b>Chair</b>	<b>Carole Sullivan (HSE)</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Nick Summers (HSE)</b>
	<b>Elsbeth Metcalfe (Independent – Public/user interests)</b>
	<b><i>Vacant</i><sup>1</sup> (Independent Expert)</b>
	<b>David Tolley (LGA)</b>
	<b>Alastair Hay (TUC)</b>
	<b>Bud Hudspith (TUC)</b>
	<b>Ian Carney (CBI)</b>
	<b>Mike Kingsland (CBI)</b>
<b>Secretariat:</b>	<b>Peter Tanczos (HSE)</b>

February 2004

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<sup>1</sup> Following the resignation of Harry Wilson.

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**ACTS Communications Working Group (CoWG)****CoWG/04/2004****Meeting date:** 12 February 2004**Open Govt. Status:** Fully Open**Exemptions:** None**Type of paper:** Information

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES**  
**COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP**

**Chemical Risk Communication Community of Practice and Interest**

**A paper by Len Morris (HSE, Chemical Risk Assessment and Control Unit)**

**Issue**

1 A Chemical Risk Communication Community of Practice and Interest has been established in order to provide technical advice and support on communication tools for the Chemicals Strategy.

**Timing**

2 Routine.

**Background**

3 As a HSE Corporate Topic Group (CTG), the Chemical Risk Assessment and Control Unit (FOD CSD3A) has a responsibility to establish Communities of Practice and Interest (COPI) for technical topics within its areas of interest. A community of practice and interest is defined as a network of people within and outside HSE who share a common interest in a topic. The group's purpose and work programme are defined by HSC/E's strategic priorities. COPIs linked to HSE's chemicals programme include groups on occupational hygiene, knowledge management, chemical risk communication and chemicals and health.

4 The Chemical Risk Communication COPI was formed in May 2003, with the aim of creating a network for the sharing of best practice, research evidence and operational experience relating to communication tools and strategies. The COPI provides an effective mechanism for sharing corporate knowledge about chemical risk communication and education and acts as a technical resource which can be drawn upon by programme coordinators in developing communication tools. The group's work programme builds on the findings of the 3Rs (Right Information, Right People, Right Way) research programme and more recent research on communication tools for reaching small firms and the public.

5 The community's current membership is drawn from HSE CTGs, policy and operational directorates and divisions and the Health and Safety Laboratory. Participation

of external experts in COPI's is encouraged by HSE and work has commenced on building an external network following a communication workshop at the British Occupational Hygiene Society Conference.

6 The COPI 's work programme feeds into the communication/education programme of the Chemicals Strategy and current projects include:

- Development of 'evidence based' guidelines on communication (CoWG/01/2004).
- Formation of an education sub group to explore options for developing vocational education materials for young people.
- Development of an educational tool on asthmagens for farm workers.
- Mapping of existing HSE guidance on chemical health risks and control measures.
- Evaluation of communication tools used in operational projects on isocyanates in the motor vehicle repair industry and on the substitution of hexavalent chromium in electroplating.

**Action**

7 Members of the working group are invited to note the development of the COPI and to suggest external experts or organisations who could be invited to participate.

**Contact:**

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