

Meeting date: 9 & 10 Nov 2006**Open Govt. Status:** Fully Open**Type of paper:** For debate**Paper File Ref:****Exemptions:**

WATCH COMMITTEE

New and Emerging Issues 2006

Issue

1. The early identification of “new and emerging” issues that may require consideration of the science involved and its implications.

Timing Considerations

2. As a government scientific advisory committee, WATCH is required to consider new and emerging issues on an annual basis.

Recommendation

3. WATCH is invited to consider the issues noted in this cover paper and to respond to the actions in paragraph 16.

Background

4. In the context of the government Chief Scientific Advisor’s “Guidelines 2000: Scientific Advice and Policy Making” and its subsequent development, WATCH is a government scientific advisory committee. According to the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (COPSAC) WATCH is required to identify, on a regular basis, whether in its opinion new issues in its particular areas of responsibility may require scientific advice or research.

5. WATCH formalised this responsibility at the October 2005 meeting (WATCH/2005/19) by instigating an on-going programme of identifying new and emerging topics for debate, prioritising those that they considered should be taken forward for further consideration and ultimately being directly or indirectly involved in appropriate activities to investigate / resolve the issues.

6. At the October 2005 meeting WATCH enlisted the assistance of additional, ad hoc members from a Community of Practice and Interest (COPI) for “Health Effects of Chemicals” that HSE had established under arrangements for its science and technology introduced in 2003. Hence it was an “expanded” WATCH that met for this purpose in October 2005.

7. Of the 12 topics identified for debate in October 2005, “expanded WATCH” grouped 6 topics into 3 top priority issues. See Annex 1 for information on the topics and Annex 2 for an extract of the relevant minutes. Various activities have been undertaken since the October meeting to progress these priority issues and each will be covered on the agenda of this November 2006 meeting.

Argument

8. Following last year's experience, COPI individuals have again been invited to the new and emerging issues session of the WATCH meeting as ad hoc members.

9. Similar to last year's procedure "expanded WATCH" has proposed topics for consideration as potential new and emerging issues. These newly identified topics are presented in Annex 1 (topics 13-21). Last years topics are also presented (topics 1-12); those already identified as a priority and on which further developments have occurred are shaded. Most topics are accompanied by a brief description of the facts and/or issues, as considered relevant by the proponent.

10. This year we have not asked named proponents to present an outline of their topics. Instead, we suggest that we adopt a looser format, in which from the outset, any member may provide comment and contribute to the debate as appropriate.

11. "Expanded WATCH" is asked to prioritise the newly and previously identified topics (excluding the shaded items). The principal objective will be to identify a further three highest priority topics. We suggest that the prioritisation task should be a majority decision.

12. Each of the three further high priority topics will then be considered in more detail. Members will be asked to recommend what action needs to be taken to address the concern, how that action may be carried out, which people / body is appropriate for taking this action forward and what timeframe is appropriate.

Link to HSC Strategy

13. The requirement to identify "new and emerging issues" is an example of a key "activity which delivers other Government objectives" within the HSC/E Strategy.

Consultation

14. No wider consultation on the content of this cover paper beyond HSE has been undertaken at this stage.

European Context

15. There are no specific links to EU procedures or activities.

Action

16. WATCH is asked to consider the issues described in this paper and :

- i) To identify three further high priority topics, with respect to being considered a 'new and emerging issue' that merits further action.

- ii) For topics agreed to be high priority to recommend ;
 - a) What action needs to be taken to address the concern ?
 - b) How might that action be carried out ?
 - c) Which individuals / organisation is appropriate for taking this action forward ?
 - d) What is an appropriate timeframe for this action to be instigated and completed ?

Contact:

Nicola Gregg
WATCH Secretariat

References / Attachments

Annex 1 List of potential new and emerging issues
Annex 2 Extract from minutes of WATCH meeting October 2005