

WATCH COMMITTEE PAPER		WATCH/2009/3	
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Exemptions:			

WATCH COMMITTEE

Asbestos : Progress towards developing a control banding approach to control of asbestos exposure situations

Issue

1. Consideration of a paper from a WATCH member exploring what could be deemed as acceptable risk, in the context of developing a control banding approach to secure appropriate control of asbestos exposure situations.

Timing considerations

2. No specific timing issues.

Recommendation

3. WATCH is invited to consider this paper and to debate the degree and manner in which the paper facilitates further development of the control banding concept for asbestos.

Background

4. At the last meeting of WATCH in February there was discussion of how a control banding approach for asbestos might be developed, on the back of the October 2008 WATCH position on asbestos risk estimation. It emerged from the February discussion that it would be important that the risk management strategies proposed in a control banding approach were anchored to a defined target level (or levels) of risk.

5. It is evident that the determination of an “appropriate” target level of risk is not only a matter of science and hence not entirely within the remit of WATCH; there are important policy and socioeconomic dimensions to this issue (see minutes, paragraph 4.31).

6. Nevertheless, in the interests of moving the debate forward within WATCH, a member offered to draft a preliminary paper on this issue for consideration at the June 2009 WATCH meeting; this is the paper attached here at Annex 1.

Argument

7. The paper focuses on defining a level of risk that could be deemed “acceptable”; and, using the previous HSE publications “The tolerability of risk from nuclear power stations” (TOR) and “Reducing risks, protecting people” (R2P2), suggests individual risk levels of 1 in a million per annum and 1 in 3 million per annum as appropriate values for “acceptable risk” to different members of the human population (Conclusion 1 of the paper).

8. The paper then considers that in calculating mesothelioma risk, account should be taken of variability in the starting age and career duration of those engaged in the asbestos removal industry. It is proposed that in deriving an individual risk level for a particular type of operation, the risk value should be based on an individual starting working at 16 and having a 30-year career, ie an individual whose age at first exposure and duration of exposure is appreciably greater than the average for this working population (Conclusion 2 of the paper).

9. As a third step, the paper then uses the two concepts above with the Hodgson & Darnton (2000) model to offer risk estimates for 30-year exposures to 0.02 fibres/ml chrysotile and 0.002 fibres/ml of crocidolite and amosite; all three such risk estimates are appreciably above the 1 in a million or 1 in 3 million levels (Conclusion 3).

10. The paper then postulates the necessity of reducing airborne exposure concentrations to below such levels and considers the feasibility of sampling and analysis for airborne concentrations of this magnitude.

11. The paper does not discuss any aspects of what measures would be required to control exposure to levels commensurate with the proposed “acceptable risk” values of Conclusion 1 of the paper. This is obviously a key issue in seeking to develop risk management strategies anchored to these specified risk levels.

Consultation

12. The main paper has been produced by a WATCH member and there has been no consultation on it.

Action

13. WATCH is asked to consider the attached paper, kindly offered by a WATCH member, and to debate how it might help to take forward the idea of developing a control banding approach for asbestos-exposure situations. A crucial issue is the proposed “acceptable risk” values and their potential use as a target to be achieved when specifying the risk management strategies of such a control banding approach.

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Attachments

Annex 1 A basis for setting Control Banding band limits for exposure to asbestos