WATCH COMMITTEE

Role of WATCH

1. From my perspective, returning to chair “new WATCH” having chaired “old WATCH” and within a period in which HSE has been re-orientating its chemicals work, I feel that some WATCH-related issues have not been sufficiently well clarified: the unique purpose of WATCH, the principal directions from which WATCH agenda items will come and the role of WATCH in dealing with such items.

2. Below is a draft statement on “The Role of WATCH”. It is a draft for discussion at the forthcoming January 2005 WATCH meeting and, subsequently (with any necessary modifications), for consideration by ACTS in the first quarter of 2005. Other material on the January WATCH agenda and the discussions we will hold over the two days of the meeting will add further clarity, illustrating examples of the types of work that fit the general criteria given below.

3. My aim is to achieve a position at the end of the January WATCH meeting where all committee members have a clear, shared understanding of the crucial role of WATCH and its positioning within the total picture of HSE’s responsibilities and work on chemicals and ill-health.

Steve Fairhurst
WATCH Chairman

THE ROLE OF WATCH

WATCH is the scientific and technical subcommittee of HSC’s Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances (ACTS). The acronym WATCH now stands for the Working group on Action To control CHemicals (for pre-2004 “old” WATCH it stood for something slightly different).

Its positioning as an ACTS subcommittee defines the territory in which it offers S&T input, ie chemicals, their health hazards, exposure, risk and control in an occupational context, and chemical-induced occupational ill-health. Its business will always be aligned with the Chemicals Strategy themes agreed by HSC in November 2002, a key element of which is now the HSE Disease Reduction Programme (formerly known as the Chemicals Programme), aimed at securing measurable reductions in the risk and occurrence of chemical-
induced occupational ill-health, both in the next few years up to 2010 and also beyond.

WATCH has a composition of 12, one of which is the chair from HSE (now Steve Fairhurst). Of the 11 members, all are **nominees, not representatives**, ie they are asked to operate as individuals and to utilise their personal knowledge and expertise. 3 are nominated by CBI, 3 by TUC, and 5 by HSE. The constitution of WATCH also gives the option for any agenda item of calling in additional experts in a particular specialism to help where there is a perceived need to strengthen the expertise present for that item.

The sources of nomination give WATCH the feature of tripartism, in that the social partners have put on to WATCH experts in whom they have confidence. This secures social partner acceptance/agreement of S&T positions emerging from WATCH; any subsequent challenges are then challenges to tripartite-shared positions, not challenges to an individual within HSE or to HSE as a body.

These features lead to the view that the expertise and constitutional position of WATCH should be brought into play on relevant and substantive S&T business, particularly when the acquisition of “social partner confidence” is important. This can be where:

- an issue is to be progressed via the regulatory process of ACTS and HSC (eg bringing in a new UK-specific regulatory measure) and where ACTS would need, and benefit from a WATCH consideration of the S&T aspects; in this respect the “WATCH stage” could be thought of as **integral** to a process.

- **the implications of a position taken on an important issue are sufficiently high** to make the securing of “social partner confidence” crucial to HSE as a regulatory body; for example where formal peer-review robustness is deemed vital, where controversy is anticipated, or where social partner agreement to (the S&T basis for and elements of) future plans/intentions is needed.

Steve Fairhurst
WATCH Chairman
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