

Meeting date:

17<sup>th</sup> June 2008Open Gov.  
Status:

Fully Open

## Secretary's Report for 13th Meeting, 17 June 2008

### A. Progress on minuted actions arising during the 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2008

Min. Ref.	Action	Status
3.3	In response to a suggestion made at the February meeting, the WATCH Secretariat committed to investigate the scope for synchronising a WATCH horizon scanning event with a British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) event of this nature taking place at HSL, Buxton in October 2008.	Secretariat discussing with HSL
7.7	HSE to plan an item on outcomes from approaches 1 and 2 and prepare an associated package for the June 2008 WATCH meeting (to include the Canadian report on chrysotile, if then available).	WATCH/2008/5 presented at June 2008 meeting

### B. Updates on other activities

#### B.1 Chlorobenzene : Proposal for a Biological monitoring guidance value (BMGV)

Following the agreement by members in February 2008 that a BMGV should be set for chlorobenzene (see 5.14 of the February minutes), progress within HSE has been made towards establishing the value. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) has been drafted. On the advice of HSE's Better Regulation Unit a 'short RIA' was required. It is anticipated that HSE's Chief Economist will approve the BMGV during summer 2008.

#### B.2 Metal Working Fluids : Progress on a HSE project

At the WATCH meeting in November 2007 HSE agreed to provide WATCH with regular updates on the 3 year project investigating the health risks posed by metal working fluids. A verbal update will be provided on 17<sup>th</sup> June.

#### B.3 Diacetyl

Occupational exposure to airborne diacetyl, a food flavouring agent in popcorn, linked to severe lung disease in the USA, was raised as a potential new and emerging issue by a WATCH member in March 2004. In following up this concern HSE confirmed in June 2004 that there was, "no evidence of diacetyl being used in the manufacture of popcorn in the UK". However, as further information became available, the Chairman reported to members in May 2005 that, "while there is still no evidence that diacetyl is used in the UK specifically in the manufacture of popcorn, it is now clear that diacetyl is commonly used in food manufacture more generally. HSE is now considering what is the appropriate course of action in seeking to establish the prevailing situation in the UK and its appropriateness".

HSE continued, with some difficulty, to secure evidence of the use of diacetyl in the food industry. Recently, a case of bronchiolitis obliterans has been reported in an employee mixing flavourings in the UK. Also, some publications suggest that lung obstruction has

been detected in employees in USA exposed to airborne diacetyl at concentrations lower than those considered to be the cause of the severe lung disease originally reported in USE employees. This has led HSE's food manufacturing and catering sector, supported by occupational hygiene expertise and HSL, to look in more detail at the risk posed by diacetyl in the food industry.

The questions being considering at present are:

1. How widely is diacetyl used?
2. What are the likely exposures of employees?
3. Are there substances other than diacetyl in food flavourings that might have a similar toxicity?
4. Are employee exposures likely to be injurious to health?

HSE's initial activities are:

1. Sending letters to food flavouring suppliers asking if they supply diacetyl.
2. Checking the literature for relevant toxicity and exposure information.

HSE hopes to provide a further update to the WATCH Autumn meeting.