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WATCH COMMITTEE

Disease Reduction Programme: Cancer Project

Introduction to the component parts of the Cancer Project; and preparation for detailed examination of a profiling exercise for carcinogens in current UK workplaces (November 2006 WATCH)

Issue

1. WATCH will be given a series of informal presentations on the component parts of the Cancer Project of the Disease Reduction Programme (DRP), with the opportunity to probe further and comment on any aspect of current plans and activity.

Timing considerations

2. A run-through of the Cancer Project at this June meeting will provide a good basis for WATCH to consider in more depth one component (a “profiling” exercise) at the next WATCH meeting in November 2006.

Recommendation

3. That WATCH members express their views on what is presented to them.

Background

4. WATCH is now familiar with the existence and some elements of the Disease Reduction Programme (DRP). Some components of DRP, eg the Skin Disease Project and the asthma strand of the Respiratory Disease Project, are aimed at helping to deliver the “Revitalising Health and Safety” (RHS) targets, one of these being to achieve by 2010 a 20% reduction in the incidence rate of cases of work-related ill-health based on statistics from 2000 as a baseline year.

5. However, the DRP also contains plans to reduce the risk (and eventually the occurrence) of longer term diseases arising from occupational exposure to chemicals; if successful, actual reductions in disease incidence for such conditions will only become evident in future decades.

6. For example, at recent meetings WATCH has considered work relating to combatting long-term occupational respiratory disease. Now, for the next two WATCH meetings, we want to engage the committee in considering the Cancer Project.

Argument

7. The Cancer Project has as an initial objective of obtaining the best estimate of the current (and predictable future) burden of occupational cancer in Great Britain, also described as the “Doll and Peto update” in recognition of their well-known analysis 25 years ago of the proportion of cancer attributable to occupation.

8. The Cancer Project then has two distinct strands, one focussing specifically on asbestos and another strand considering appropriate activity in relation to all other chemical carcinogens. Each of these strands will be described in outline at the WATCH meeting. The “non-asbestos” strand is aiming at:

- improved knowledge about the use, exposure and management of risks from occupational carcinogens; and
- identification of chemical carcinogens (or occupations), processes of concern and options for improving the control of carcinogens and baselines for evaluation

9. Progress towards these two bullet points has been advanced by a “profiling” exercise. Attached at Annex 1 is a brief paper outlining the basis for this profiling work and the proposed criteria to be used within it, together with three representative examples of profiled substances (beryllium, hydrazine and rubber fume). Further clarification will be provided via presentations to WATCH at the June meeting; the other components of the Project will also be covered and copies of the slides will be tabled on the day.

Link to HSC Strategy

10. The Cancer Project is part of the Disease Reduction Programme, itself a component of the “Fit3” Strategic Programme.

Consultation

11. None on this paper in itself, although there has been much consultation on elements of the Cancer Project.

European Context

12. None

Action

13. WATCH is asked to look at the attached Annex, receive presentations at the June meeting and then to comment on the current plans of the Cancer Project.

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References / Attachments

Non Asbestos strand : Substance Profiling :

- Annex 1 Priorities for further information gathering
- Annex 2 Potency ranking exercise
- Annex 3 Beryllium
- Annex 4 Hydrazine
- Annex 5 Rubber Process Dust and Rubber Fume