

Meeting date: February 2010**Open Govt. Status:** Fully Open**Type of paper:** For discussion**Paper File Ref:****Exemptions:**

WATCH COMMITTEE

Asbestos: progress on the action plan from the November 2009 WATCH meeting

Issue

1. Developments arising from various aspects of the action plan agreed by WATCH at its November 2009 meeting.

Timing Considerations

2. No particular timing issues.

Recommendation

3. WATCH is asked to express its view on how matters stand in relation to each aspect of the action plan.

Background

4. Since November 2007 WATCH has been working on an item titled "The risks of lung cancer and mesothelioma from relatively low-level exposures to different forms of asbestos". At its meeting in November 2009 WATCH developed an action plan, set out in the draft minutes of the meeting at paragraphs 4.48 and 4.49 and reproduced below.

4.48 The Chairman thanked members for their comments and brought discussion on the item to a close. He noted that members had made a number of suggestions for how this WATCH item could be progressed further forward. He summarised these as an action plan:

- (i) The position established by WATCH at the October 2008 WATCH meeting should be revisited at the next WATCH meeting in February 2009. The purpose would be to examine whether or not additional risk estimates for lower level exposures, particularly to the amphibole forms of asbestos, could be made. WATCH should also further develop and clarify its view on how the H&D model should or should not be used to derive positions on risk.**
- (ii) An interim report, summarising WATCH's progress on asbestos to date, should be drafted by the WATCH secretariat and sent to WATCH, ACTS and relevant people in HSE, to invite responses. The report will incorporate a summary of the action plan proposed by WATCH.**
- (iii) A working group of WATCH (and ACTS) members and HSE/HSL people would seek to further develop the control banding model for asbestos into a practically applicable tool.**
- (iv) In so doing, the group would examine the scope for applying the control banding tool to test whether current advice on exposure control can be**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (v) (vi) 	<p>applied to give consistently low exposure scenarios.</p> <p>WATCH advocated that simple advice be issued to workers likely to encounter asbestos materials in work-related tasks (e.g. builders and allied trades). WATCH indicated that this message should be relayed to HSE to ensure that a sustained campaign of awareness-raising and advice ensues, targeting these workers.</p> <p>WATCH advocates further research (collecting existing information and possibly pursuing new data) to more fully characterise what is known about exposure to asbestos in buildings. HSE/HSL will report back on this at the next WATCH meeting.</p>
<p>4.49 ACTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) (ii) (iii) (iv) 	

5. This paper brings WATCH up to date with further developments against each of the Actions.

Argument

4.49 (i) The relevant member to prepare WATCH for dealing with 4.48 (i) at the next WATCH meeting

6. As yet nothing has been submitted to the WATCH Secretariat on this item. Any material received in the run-up to the meeting will be sent out to WATCH as quickly as possible.

4.49 (ii) The WATCH Secretariat to prepare an interim report summarising the committees progress to data on asbestos to date and suggesting further actions and to disseminate this to ACTS and relevant people in HSE, copied to WATCH. This to encompass 4.48 (v) above.

7. Such a report was prepared and sent to the intended recipients in late November 2009. A copy is attached here at Annex 1. A response to this report from HSE's Asbestos Policy Unit is attached here as Annex 2. Among the various points made there is an important perspective on the concept of a control banding tool (see below).

4.49 (iii) WATCH members to indicate to the chairman their willingness to participate in a working group aiming to further develop the control banding tool. As part of its work, the group to explore 4.48 (iv) above

8. The working group membership was identified and as a first step Garry Burdett sent to its members a questionnaire covering various aspects of the envisaged control banding tool; to date, one response has been received.

9. In the intervening period since the November 2009 WATCH meeting, on further reflection HSE's Asbestos Policy Unit has concluded that the concept of a control banding tool is not a priority for HSE and therefore HSE does not wish to commit resources to its further development (see Annex 2 paragraph 7). HSE-sponsored work on the tool has therefore stopped.

10. Garry Burdett has done some exploratory work in relation to point 4.48 (iv) of the draft minutes of the November 2009 meeting (see above); but at the time of writing there is not a finalised paper for distribution.

4.49 (iv) HSE/HSL to summarise the knowledge it has on airborne levels of asbestos in buildings for the next WATCH meeting

11. A paper on this issue written by HSE/HSL is attached as Annex 3.

12. Additionally, a WATCH member suggested that the WATCH Chairman should approach ATAC (Asbestos Testing and Consulting) to ask if ATAC possesses data that could be informative. Such an approach has been made and ATAC is now in direct contact with the WATCH member in question, with a view to characterising what information might be available.

Link to HSE Strategy

13. This work relates directly to HSE's statutory responsibilities in relation to asbestos; it is also relevant to the asbestos strand of the Long Latency Disease interventions programme.

Consultation

14. There has been no external consultation on this cover paper, although there has been some external interaction in relation to some aspects, as described in this paper and Annexes.

European Context

15. There are no specific links to active EU processes or activities.

Action

16. WATCH is asked to express its view and position in relation to each aspect of the further developments since the November 2009 WATCH meeting.

Contact:

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