

CONTAMINATION SPECIALIST GROUP

Notes of the fourth meeting, held at 11:00am on Monday 10 October 2011 at St Philips Place, Birmingham

Present:

Stan Brown	FSNI (Chair)
Pierre Bernard	LGC Forensics
Tim Clayton	FSS
Alan Cook	Essex Police
June Guinness	Home Office
Andy Rennison	Forensic Science Regulator
Kenny Chigbo	Home Office (Secretary)

Welcome/Introductions

1.1 Stan Brown welcomed all present to the fourth meeting of the Contamination Specialist Group.

Minutes of the last meeting

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Matters arising

3.1 The actions from the last meeting were either cleared or have been overtaken by events.

DNA Contamination/Blood screening

4.1 Andy Rennison introduced this item, stating that the Meredith Kercher case in Italy highlighted the need to focus on contamination issues. The way the crime scene was handled brought classic contamination issues to the fore and there maybe a backlash in the UK. He was concerned about the flow of forensic evidence from the crime scene to the lab and to the NDNAD. There was a need to identify possible contaminant profiles and collaborate with the delivery unit of the NDNAD. He was comfortable with contamination control in labs. The areas of concern about potential contamination were through consumables and the crime scene.

4.2 He proposed a single exclusion database for the police, forensic service providers and equipment suppliers. The Contamination Specialist Group was asked to consider drafting an appendix for exclusion databases for the Code of Practice. This could cover providers of consumables, people at the crime scene, lab staff, visitors, etc. The views of the National DNA Database Ethics Group should be sought, before the proposal is tabled before the Forensic Science Advisory Council.

Action: Andy Rennison/June Guinness

4.3 Stan Brown agreed to send a copy of the Northern Ireland policy on elimination databases.

Action: Stan Brown

4.4 Continuing, Andy indicated that there were examples of poor practice in evidence collection in police labs. There is a commitment for all forces to be accredited to ISO17025 by November 2013 in line with EU legislation. The Association of Forensic Science Providers wrote to Ministers with regards to concerns around evidence recovery. This process will have to be managed through accreditation. The NPIA has a project plan in place to support labs in gaining accreditation. At the present, visual and microscopic screening for blood will carry on until the labs are accredited by the 2013 deadline; but other evidence recovery work should stop. There is a need to establish what forces are doing beyond blood screening, but it appears that activities outside blood screening are very limited.

4.5 It was agreed that this group should consider the contamination risks once an exhibit has been received and draft some guidelines using a HACCP type approach. This should be in the form of a second appendix on cross contamination. It was noted that Australia were producing a new set of standards for forensics that could be referred to in drafting the guidelines. It includes recognising, recovery and storing of material. Andy will seek permission to circulate the document.

Action: Andy Rennison

4.5 The Group agreed to draft an appendix for the Regulator's Code of Practice around contamination control, prevention and avoidance. Help could be sought from the NPIA or some SSMs from forces.

4.6 Stan agreed to pull together high level principles from the policies of FSNI, the FSS and LGC on elimination databases.

Action: Stan Brown

4.7 Andy will speak to Kevin Sullivan about leading on this work.

Action: Andy Rennison

4.8 The Group acknowledged that the challenges for the three communities that need to be on the elimination databases were different and the distinction needed to be made. The communities were police staff, scientific staff and equipment suppliers. There were different considerations for each community, but they had the same ultimate goal in reducing contamination. The practicalities of dealing with each community are different. It was agreed in combination with 4.2 above that a one page high level document should be drafted seeking the Ethics Group's views at their next meeting in December.

Action: June Guinness/Kenny Chigbo

PAS on consumables

5.1 The PAS was described as a quick route to getting a standard for consumables. Kevin Sullivan has been contracted by BSI to undertake the role of Technical Author. A steering group from trade associations is being established. The first draft of the standard will be reviewed by the steering

group. It is expected that this Group and the DNA Specialist Group will feed into the consultation process.

5.2 The standard will be enforced through the procurement process for the police, forensic services providers, etc. It was also suggested that the PAS should also cover validating, decontaminating agents, and the efficacy of the agents. This could be covered under environmental monitoring.

Any Other Business

6.1 Members were asked to note that there will be a UK forensics conference next year focusing on R&D.

6.2 The Group discussed the availability of standards on the physical design of labs. Pharmaceutical manufacturers may have these standards that may need adapting for a forensic environment. The FSS may already have something similar for forensic suites. Andy and Stan agreed to consider whether guidance is required for lab construction/design.

Action: Stan Brown/Andy Rennison

Date of next meeting

5.1 TBA for March next year.

Action: Kenny Chigbo