

COMARE – Annual Report 2022

1. What we do / our role

The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) is an expert scientific advisory committee for the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) that provides independent advice to the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations on a wide range of public health issues associated with radioactivity and radiation.

The main Committee meets three times a year, either online or in-person, and the minutes of these meetings are published on the [COMARE webpage](#). Observers are welcome to attend the in-person meetings, as detailed in the [procedures for open meetings](#). COMARE's working groups, subgroups and specialist subcommittees meet more often to consider evidence and prepare materials to support the main Committee. Much of the work is done outside the formal meetings.

The main Committee hears, considers, questions and discusses reports from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), the Environment Agency (EA), and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) among others. The Committee opens its face-to-face meetings to observers and receives submissions from third parties.

2. Membership

At the close of 2021, the Committee comprised of seventeen expert members and two lay members.

In November 2022, Professor Paul Pharoah retired from the Committee. Four members were reappointed for a further term on COMARE (Dr Jane Barrett, Professor David Sutton, Professor Stewart Martin and Dr Ray Kemp). At the close of 2022, the Committee comprised of sixteen expert members and two lay members.

Expert members are drawn from a broad range of scientific and medical disciplines to support COMARE's technical work. Lay members have a specific role to represent the public interest aspects of the Committee's work and to advise accordingly. All members have equal status on the Committee.

3. COMARE Meetings

In 2022, the main Committee meetings were:

- 131st meeting – 11th March
- 132nd meeting – 7th July
- 133rd meeting – 15th November

The 131st and 132nd meetings were held using an online platform. The 133rd meeting was an in person meeting and was attended by two observers.

Subcommittees, working groups and subgroups:

[Details](#) of the various subcommittees, working groups and subgroups can be found on the COMARE webpage.

The Cardio-/Cerebrovascular Effects Subcommittee (CCES) held three meetings in 2022. All meetings were held online.

- 3rd CCES meeting – 25th January
- 4th CCES meeting – 30th March
- 5th CCES meeting – 21st October

The standing Contaminations Working Group (CWG) completed its two annual meetings. The first meeting was held using an online platform and the second meeting used a hybrid format.

- 19th CWG meeting – 10th March
- 20th CWG meeting – 14th November

2022 saw the establishment of two new subgroups of COMARE, one examining plans by the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) to revise its recommendations on protection from ionising radiation, and one focussing on health issues relating to exposures to non-ionising electromagnetic fields (EMFs). The ICRP Recommendations Subgroup (IRS) and the EMF and Health Subgroup (EAHS) held their first meetings in 2022, which were conducted using an online platform.

- 1st IRS meeting – 5th October
- 1st EAHS meeting – 1st November

The Authorisations Working Group (AWG) conducted its work via electronic correspondence. No meetings were held by the group.

4. Progress on 2021-2022 work programme

SUBCOMMITTEES:

Cardio-/cerebrovascular effects of ionising radiation

There is increasing evidence of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular effects from radiation exposure. COMARE established a subcommittee in 2020 to investigate the potential health impacts that may be caused by low doses of radiation and to advise DHSC on possible implications for the UK. In 2022, three meetings were held to progress work on the project.

WORKING GROUPS:

Contaminations

The Contaminations Working Group (CWG) met twice in 2022 and considered updates on two beach monitoring programmes: at Dounreay in Scotland and Sellafield in Cumbria, noting the radioactive particles detected at each site. The CWG also followed the monitoring work and remediation programme being undertaken at Dalgety Bay in the Firth of Forth.

In July, three CWG members attended an online workshop arranged by a contractor to Sellafield Ltd to consider proposals for the future beach monitoring programme. In November, four CWG members visited the Sellafield site and the nearby Low Level Waste Repository (LLWR). Helpful discussions were held with staff at both facilities, focussing at Sellafield on the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo (MSSS) and associated monitoring of leakage to groundwater. Findings from the visit were discussed by the CWG and full Committee at their November meetings.

Authorisations

The Authorisations Working Group (AWG) is responsible for COMARE's standing commitment to advise on discharges of radioactive materials when applications are received for new or revised authorisations. The Working Group responds to relevant consultations on draft authorisations and keeps the main Committee aware of its proceedings. The AWG continued to conduct its work online throughout the year.

In 2022, the AWG responded to two Environment Agency consultations – the first on an environmental permit variation application for Barrow Shipyards and the second on a decision document regarding a proposed permit decision for the proposed Sizewell C power station.

5. Additional items under consideration by the committee

- The Committee received and considered two updates from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) at its 133rd meeting on 15th November – one on radon issues and the second on EMF and health issues.
- Updates on the work with the Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SAHSU), based in Imperial College, London, on the surveillance of childhood cancer incidence in the vicinity of nuclear installations in Great Britain were provided to COMARE throughout the year.

6. Correspondence

The Committee received and responded to correspondence regarding public concerns on issues of relevance to COMARE's work. In 2022 there were twelve detailed emails that required a response. The secretariat took primary responsibility for responses, referring to the Chair as necessary and keeping the Committee informed.

The Committee received and responded to three Freedom of Information requests in 2022. All three were generic requests for information which were sent to multiple organisations. None were targeted at COMARE's work and COMARE did not hold the information for any of these requests.

COMARE was mentioned in the answers to five Parliamentary Questions posed in 2022. UIN 148449 related to the European Parliament's Panel for the Future of Science and Technology report on the health impact of 5G; UIN 26890, 26893, 26894 and 64414 related to melanoma and the use of sunbeds.

7. Representation

Dr Mark Hill replaced Professor Stewart Martin as COMARE's representative on the Public and Community Oversight Group (PCOG) for the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Protection Research Unit (HPRU) in Chemical & Radiation Threats and Hazards.

8. Items of published information provided to members

In addition to the primary papers circulated for discussion at each meeting, COMARE members are provided with copies of relevant peer-reviewed publications and digital links to reports from professional bodies and other scientific committees. In 2022, information papers and links were provided to Committee members for the following topics:

Ionising radiation (IR)	34 items
Non-ionising radiation (NIR)	17 items
IR & NIR	1 item
Ultraviolet radiation (UV)	4 items

9. Future meetings and work programme

The meetings dates for 2023 were agreed by the Committee.

- 134th meeting – 8th March
- 135th meeting – 4th July
- 136th meeting – 8th November

The Committee will continue with the major themes of its work during 2023, supported by its Contaminations Working Group, Authorisations Working Group, ICRP Recommendations Subgroup and EMF and Health Subgroup. Updates from UKHSA will be considered, including regular items on EMFs and radon, as will peer-reviewed papers and reports published during the year.

The Committee expects that its report on cardiovascular and cerebrovascular effects will be submitted to DHSC during the year.