

134th COMARE MEETING, Wednesday 8th March 2023.

COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASPECTS OF RADIATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Online meeting

Present	Chair:	Professor John Harrison
	Members:	Professor Frank de Vocht Dr Mark Hill Dr Colin Martin Dr Ray Kemp Professor Stewart Martin Dr Susan McCready-Shea Dr Richard McNally Professor Lesley Rhodes Professor Graham Smith Professor James Smith Professor Malcolm Sperrin Professor David Sutton Dr Chris Westcott
	Assessors:	DHSC EA FSA NDA NI DH ONR SEPA UKHSA
	Secretariat:	Dr Simon Mann (UKHSA) Dr Emma Petty (UKHSA) Mrs Samantha Watson (UKHSA)

Open Session

1. Welcome & declarations

- 1.1 The Chair opened the 134th meeting, welcomed members and assessors and noted that the meeting is split into an open and a closed session.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed the substitute assessor for FSA and the new HSE assessor to the meeting. He informed members that the DHSC assessor had taken up a position at the new Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero and welcomed the new DHSC assessor to their first meeting.
- 1.3 The Chair reminded members of the private nature of the Committee's proceedings and that those papers marked "For Members Use Only" should be kept in members' own hands. Members were also reminded that they should disclose any relevant interests to the Chair.
- 1.4 Apologies were received from Dr Jane Barrett, Professor David Read, and assessors for DfE, EA, FSA, NHS Scotland and SEPA. The Chair reminded assessors that substitutes may attend the meeting.

2. Minutes of the 133rd COMARE meeting

i. Minutes, actions & matters arising

- 2.1 The Chair asked for comments or corrections to the minutes from the 133rd meeting. One amendment was agreed, and the minutes were approved. The Chair noted that the minutes of the open session will be posted on the COMARE webpage. The minutes of the closed session will remain confidential.

[Action: Secretariat]

- 2.2 The Chair noted that an ongoing action had been previously placed on BEIS to provide details of the consultation on the draft policy on radioactive substances. This consultation was opened on 1st March 2023 by the Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero and closes on 24th May 2023. COMARE's Authorisations Working Group (AWG) will respond to the consultation and the main Committee will review the response before submission.

[Action: AWG & Members]

- 2.3 The Chair noted that an action was previously placed on HSE to provide an update on the impacts of changes to the radon dose coefficients. The HSE assessors reported that work has now started, and stakeholders will be approached to gain an understanding of the impact on businesses. It is also about 12 years since the HSE radon policy approach was reviewed, and an options paper is being developed for discussion. It is likely to be completed by the end of 2023 or early 2024. The Chair added that COMARE would be interested to see the progression of this work and the conclusions.

- 2.4 The Chair noted that an action was placed on him to discuss with Professor Rhodes and DHSC whether the 13th COMARE report on health effects and risks from UV sunbeds might require updating. Professor Rhodes provided members with background information on the issue. The DHSC assessor reported that a research proposal was being considered on sunbed use in England. It was suggested that any review by COMARE should follow this research. DHSC will advise the secretariat on the timescale for this project.

[Action: DHSC]

- 2.5 Members discussed the context of the relative risk of sunbed use compared to outdoor sun exposure and also the approaches taken in other countries on the use of sunbeds. It was suggested that other organisations could help provide a community view of the issue. Professor Rhodes agreed to start making contact with relevant organisations.

[Action: Professor Rhodes]

- 2.6 The Chair reported on an action placed on him to consider standardisation of terms such as high or low dose / dose rate / activity. Professor G Smith has agreed to lead on this issue and to draft a discussion document. It was noted that this is a matter of communication, and that there should be consideration of how different committees express levels of risk. Members agreed to provide information on this topic and assist in drafting the document.

[Action: Professor G Smith & Members]

3. Committee matters

i. Correspondence and updates

- 3.1 The Chair drew members' attention to the briefing note on the correspondence for COMARE since the last meeting. One FOI request has been received since November 2022. This was a generic request regarding information on contacts with the tobacco industry, which was sent to multiple recipients. COMARE has not been mentioned in any Parliamentary

Questions since the last meeting. There have been two email enquiries for COMARE; one requesting information on COMARE's link to DHSC, and one requesting details on the publication of information on working groups, subgroups and subcommittees. Both enquiries were handled by the Secretariat.

ii. **2022 Annual Report & Work Programme 2023-2024**

3.2 The Chair thanked Dr Kemp and Dr Westcott for their help with the 2022 Annual Report and asked for members' comments on the document. One amendment was agreed.

3.3 The Chair asked members for comments on the 2023-2024 Work Programme and if there were additional areas of interest for the Committee. One amendment was made to the document. The Chair informed members that both finalised documents would be placed on the COMARE webpage.

[Action: Secretariat]

4. Updates to the Committee:

i. **Contaminations Working Group**

4.1 The Chair informed members that the CWG has not met since November 2022, with the next meeting planned for 4th May 2023. The CWG Chair, Professor Read, has sent his apologies for this meeting.

4.2 The EA assessor reported that the 2022 Sellafeld beach monitoring programme was completed with 117 hectares monitored against a target of 105 hectares. In total, 49 particles and 7 larger objects were detected, and no intervention was required. One cobalt-60-rich particle was found. There is a downward trend of activity of cobalt-60-rich particles over time, indicating this is likely to be from historical discharge. The 2023 programme started on 6th February, with a 105-hectare target. To date there have been 23 particles retrieved. Members discussed the trends of alpha- and beta-rich particle finds over recent years.

4.3 The EA assessor reported that the previously reported Magnox Swarf Storage Silo leak remains stable at around 2.5 m³ per day. Options are being developed to mitigate the leak. A priority is risk reduction by retrieval of wastes, which is progressing well.

4.4 The SEPA assessor reported that remediation at Dalgety Bay has been suspended since the end of September 2022 and will resume in April 2023. Foreshore monitoring has continued, and signage is still in place, with fencing in place in areas where high activity particles have been found.

4.5 The SEPA assessor reported that there have been no finds on the foreshore at Dounreay since March 2022. Analysis of last year's winter storms is still underway and COMARE will be informed when this is available. There was one minor find at Sandside beach in November 2022. SEPA have held discussions with the local stakeholder group regarding concerns over the increased number of foreshore finds last spring. The Particles Retrieval Advisory Group (Dounreay) (PRAG(D)) is considering impacts of monitoring activity since 2012; the next meeting is scheduled for May 2023.

ii. **Authorisations Working Group (AWG)**

4.6 The Chair noted that the AWG has not considered any consultations since the last meeting. Professor Sutton confirmed there was nothing to report.

iii. EMF and Health Subgroup (EAHS)

- 4.7 The Chair informed members that the EAHS held its second meeting on 9th February 2023. The EAHS Chair, Professor de Vocht, reported that the subgroup discussed papers related to EMFs and health, including some of those provided as COMARE information papers. Members were advised that there was discussion regarding 6G, which uses higher frequencies, and the subgroup will maintain a watching brief on this issue.
- 4.8 Members discussed concerns from the general public regarding risks from electricity smart meters and also electromagnetic hypersensitivity (EHS). Attention was drawn to existing guidance by UKHSA on smart meters: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smart-meters-radio-waves-and-health>. The EAHS have agreed to maintain a watching brief on EHS.

iv. ICRP Recommendations Subgroup (IRS)

- 4.9 The Chair advised members that the second meeting of the ICRP Recommendations Subgroup was held on 2nd February 2023. The IRS Chair, Dr McCready-Shea, reported that the subgroup discussed updates by ICRP and highlights from a recent ICRP meeting. It was noted that some countries have still not implemented the 2007 ICRP recommendations.
- 4.10 Members were informed that some new areas of work are planned by ICRP. There are two current consultations underway which may have relevance for COMARE. The first is 'Radiological protection in Surface and Near-Surface Disposal of Solid Radioactive Waste', the other on 'Practical Aspects in Optimisation of Radiological Protection in Digital Radiography, Fluoroscopy, and CT'. Since the IRS meeting, two more documents have been released. A subgroup member is being identified to lead a scoping review on each document. COMARE will be kept informed on the subgroup's level of response to the consultations and any input requirements from the main Committee. Members discussed the presentation of dose coefficients in ICRP reports and associated peer-reviewed publications.

5. Information papers

- 5.1 The Chair brought the 12 information papers and the four digital links to the Committee's attention. Members were reminded that the aim of the information papers is to provide the Committee with strong reviews and new, high quality scientific studies, relevant to the Committee's work programme.
- 5.2 Members noted that there were four papers presented on non-ionising radiation; including, a paper by de Vocht & Albers on how conflicts of interest can exist in literature and a paper by Pitron et al which reported that EHS is a real phenomenon even though the cause is not fully understood. An ionising radiation paper by Kotre referenced ALARP cost-benefit analysis in hospital-based radiation protection. Members discussed cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit approaches.
- 5.3 The Chair highlighted the link to the latest issue of the SRP magazine, Radiation Protection Today. Members also discussed papers by Simon et al on excess risk of cancer and non-cancer disease, and by Hauptmann et al on brain cancer risk from paediatric CT scans.

6. AOB

- 6.1 The Chair noted that British Institute of Radiology's Radiation Safety Week ran from 27th February to 3rd March 2023, with the BIR publishing daily advice sheets. The advice sheet on [Patient Skin Dose Management](#) referenced the 19th COMARE report (Radiation doses in interventional radiology: issues for patients and staff within the UK).

Closed session

7. Studies in progress

i. Thyroid cancer incidence study

ii. SAHSU update

7.1 The minutes for these items were considered as reserved business as they concerned pre-publication material.

8. COMARE Subcommittee reports

i. Cardio-/cerebrovascular effects

8.1 The minutes for these items were considered as reserved business as they concerned pre-publication material.

Close of meeting

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions to the meeting. The next COMARE meeting will be held online on Tuesday 4th July 2023. The following meeting on Wednesday 8th November 2023 will be held in person. The Chair closed the meeting at 12.12 pm.