

Current COMARE Work Programme (April 2024 – March 2025)

COMARE publications in progress:

The association of cardio-/cerebrovascular disease with radiation exposure

There is increasing evidence of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular effects from radiation exposure. COMARE has established a subcommittee to investigate the potential health impacts of circulatory diseases caused by low doses of radiation and will advise DHSC on the possible health implications for the UK. It is anticipated that this advice will be submitted as a short report.

Issues under consideration by COMARE:

The effects of light on human health

The report into the effects of light and noise pollution on human health by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee made recommendations regarding the scientific evidence of health effects and public policy implications. The Committee concluded environmental noise and light remain neglected pollutants, are poorly understood and poorly regulated despite their potential to negatively impact human health. COMARE will undertake a scoping exercise of the available evidence on the health issues associated with light pollution.

Review of COMARE publications:

Published reports

COMARE will consider the outcomes of published COMARE reports and will determine if further review is required.

As part of this work, the committee is keeping a watching brief on the DHSC-commissioned epidemiological study to investigate any association of thyroid cancer incidence with Sellafield discharges, in particular those associated with the Windscale nuclear reactor fire in 1957. This study was proposed in recommendation 3 of the 17th COMARE report and is being prepared for publication.

The committee is working with the Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SASHU) to examine childhood cancer incidence in the vicinity of nuclear installations in England, Wales and Scotland. This work follows recommendation 5 of the 11th COMARE report that the incidence of leukaemia, non-Hodgkin lymphoma and other cancers in the vicinities of Sellafield and Dounreay should be kept under surveillance and periodic review. This study has been submitted for publication.

Working Groups:

Contaminations

The Contaminations Working Group (CWG) will continue to consider updates on the beach monitoring programmes submitted from Dounreay and Sellafield, noting the particles detected at each site. The working group will also follow the monitoring work being undertaken at Dalgety Bay and the remediation programme. The CWG will continue to monitor information about the release of radioactive leachate from the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo (MSSS) at Sellafield and plans for its remediation.

Authorisations

COMARE has a standing commitment to advise on authorised discharges of radioactive materials as and when new or revised authorisations are produced. The Authorisations Working Group (AWG) will advise on draft authorisations and keep the Committee aware of its responses.

Subgroups:

ICRP Recommendations Subgroup

The International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) has embarked on the process of developing new recommendations, the outcomes of which may impact on radiological protection regarding workers, patients, members of the public and the environment. The ICRP Recommendations Subgroup (IRS) will advise COMARE on the ICRP developments towards new recommendations, inform COMARE of the associated health implications for the UK and also maintain awareness of responses being formulated by other international and national groups.

EMF and Health Subgroup

COMARE continues to recognise the public health concerns regarding exposures to electromagnetic fields (EMF). The EMF and Health Subgroup (EAHS) will advise COMARE on health impacts and concerns associated with the exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs). This will include reviewing available evidence on the UK public health impact of radiofrequency radiation, with consideration of both existing and new technologies, to determine if further review is warranted.

Items under consideration by COMARE:

Electromagnetic Fields

In addition to the work of the EAHS, the Committee will be kept up to date on studies of the possible health effects of EMFs through published information from a range of sources, as it becomes available.

UV radiation

COMARE will be kept up to date on international developments relating to protection from natural and artificial exposures to ultraviolet radiation.

Radon

COMARE will be kept aware of the progress with issues relating to radon exposure in homes, schools, public buildings and elsewhere. Any new epidemiological or dosimetric data will be brought to the attention of the Committee so it may consider the current risk estimates from radon in the home in the light of these new data.

SAHSU

COMARE has a standing commitment to consider any epidemiological studies involving radiation issues reported by SAHSU.