

137th COMARE MEETING, Wednesday 6th March 2024.

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 Ray Kemp Dr Colin Martin Professor Stewart Martin Dr Richard McNally Professor David Read Professor Graham Smith Professor James Smith Professor David Sutton Dr Chris Westcott
	Assessors:	DESNZ DHSC EA FSA HSE ONR SEPA SG UKHSA WG
	Secretariat:	Dr Simon Mann (UKHSA) Dr Emma Petty (UKHSA) Mrs Samantha Watson (UKHSA)

Open Session

1. Welcome & declarations

- 1.1 The Chair opened the 137th 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 new DESNZ assessor, and the substitute SG assessor.
- 1.3 Apologies were received from Dr Susan McCready-Shea, Professor Mireille Toledano and Professor Lesley Rhodes, and the assessor for NDA. The Chair reminded assessors that substitutes may attend the meeting.
- 1.4 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.

2. Minutes of the 136th COMARE meeting

i. Minutes, actions & matters arising

- 2.1 The Chair asked for comments or corrections to the minutes from the 136th meeting. No comments were raised, and it was agreed the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting. 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.
- 2.2 The Chair reminded members that the report from the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on light and noise pollution was discussed at the last meeting. He reported that he has had discussions with UKHSA and DHSC concerning health issues associated with light pollution and that it has been agreed that COMARE will review this area with a scoping exercise.
- 2.3 The Chair asked Dr Mark Hill to update members on the storage of the Oxford Survey of Childhood Cancers (OSCC) database. This has been discussed with Dr Gerry Kendall and contact has been made with the Oxford Cancer Data Team. Further discussions are planned.
- 2.4 The Chair noted the action to find a location for the EMF and Health Subgroup's paper on selection criteria. This paper is now available from the [COMARE Documents folder](#) on the COMARE website.
- 2.5 The Chair advised members that the updates on the COSMOS project and SAHSU study will be postponed to the next meeting as Professor Toledano was not able to attend this meeting.

[Action: Professor Toledano]

- 2.6 The Chair asked the UKHSA assessor for a response to the actions from the UKHSA radon update at the 136th meeting. The UKHSA assessor reported that:

- The update of the National Radon Action Plan was triggered by Regulation 10(2)(b) of the [Ionising Radiation \(Basic Safety Standards\) \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Regulations 2018](#), which specify that the NRAP must “be updated at intervals of no more than five years”.
- There has been no change in the policy for radon detectors in the UK. The USA and UK have very different radon measurement protocols. The USA is unusual in that it uses closed-house measurements over a few days to give a worst case. In the UK, we are similar to the rest of Europe in that we specify normal living or working conditions and use measurements over 3 months. We then apply a seasonal correction factor to estimate the annual average concentration. The UK radon measurement protocol was established in the 1990s and has been incorporated into the [Validation Scheme](#) that specifies the performance characteristics of the radon detectors. The requirement for the reference level to be in terms of annual average concentration is in legislation¹.

The performance testing of lower-cost electronic radon detectors has been investigated by the UKHSA Radon Group and a paper is shortly to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. COMARE will be updated once this has been published.

[Action: UKHSA]

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/482/regulation/8>,
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1075/regulation/3/made>.

3. Committee matters

i Correspondence

3.1 The Chair brought members' attention to the briefing note on correspondence to COMARE. There was one FOI request since the last meeting, which was sent to multiple recipients. There has been no mention of COMARE in Parliamentary Questions since the last meeting. One email enquiry on ultrasound exposure from an ultrasonic cat deterrent was received and handled by the secretariat.

ii 2023 Annual Report & COMARE Work Programme 2024-2025

3.2 The Chair asked for members' comments on the 2023 Annual Report. No comments were made. The Annual Report will be placed on the COMARE webpage.

[Action: Secretariat]

3.3 The Chair advised members that the COMARE's work programme for April 2024-March 2025 has been drafted and discussed with DHSC. The Chair asked members for comments on the work programme. The work programme will be placed on the COMARE webpage.

[Action: Secretariat]

3.4 It was noted that the work programme includes the effects of light on human health as an issue under consideration by COMARE. DHSC have agreed to a scoping exercise of the available evidence on the health issues associated with light pollution. Members were alerted to a recent [ICNIRP statement](#) on short wavelength light noted as relevant to this work. The terms of reference for the scoping exercise will make clear what the exercise will cover. Members discussed the regulation of and environmental interest in light pollution.

3.5 The Chair advised that members with expertise in the area of light pollution will be recruited onto the Committee in the forthcoming recruitment round. It was noted that a number of current members will be completing their terms of office on COMARE during the year and their posts will also be included for recruitment.

iii COMARE reputation

3.6 The Chair informed members that in December 2023 the Guardian published a series of articles on Sellafield. One article on the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo (MSSS) leak included unauthorised comments from a COMARE member. The Chair advised members that such occurrences can have a negative impact on the reputation of COMARE and that dealings with the media should be undertaken in line with the guidance in the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils ([CoPSAC](#)). The Chair is the official spokesperson for COMARE, unless agreed otherwise.

4. Updates to the Committee:

i. UK research projects

4.1 The Chair noted that Professor Toledano was to give a presentation on the COSMOS study. Professor Toledano has sent her apologies and the presentation will be postponed to the next meeting.

ii. Contaminations Working Group (CWG)

4.2 Professor Read, the CWG Chair, presented a summary of the CWG meeting held on 28th February 2024. He reported that 120 hectares have been monitored in the 2023 beach monitoring programme at Sellafield, higher than the 105 hectares target. There were 78 particles found, most of which were alpha-rich. Find rates remain within the range seen since 2014. A new contractor is being appointed to start the next beach monitoring programme in

April 2024. Sellafield are looking at the age profile of particles released since monitoring began in 2006. Professor Read also reported that one particle was found on the Dounreay West Foreshore in February 2024 and five minor particles were found on Sandside Beach last year. There is still concern that routing electricity cables from offshore wind farms to a substation could disturb the seabed at Dounreay. Discussion is ongoing between SEPA and the operators. Remediation has been completed at Dalgety Bay, with around 12,000 particles removed. There will be continued monitoring by the MOD for two years before SEPA takes control. SEPA are still waiting for documentation to complete the closure report on the remediation. Professor Read noted that the CWG also discussed other potentially radioactively contaminated sites.

4.3 Professor J Smith gave a presentation to the committee on depleted uranium in Ukraine and recent publications on this issue, which was previously given to the CWG. It was noted that the evidence doesn't support some of the conclusions being made. The CWG will maintain a watching brief on the issue. Members discussed the clarification of good science.

4.4 The Chair informed members that a small group from the CWG met with a group from CoRWM to discuss areas of mutual interest. The meeting was well received and will likely be repeated on an annual basis, with the potential for ad-hoc meetings in between. Dr Kemp agreed to act as liaison between the two committees.

[Action: Dr Kemp]

4.5 The Chair reported that during the meeting with CoRWM the committees' websites were discussed. The COMARE website was viewed as not very user-friendly, but it was recognised there are limits imposed with government websites. Members discussed possible content to publish and the potential risks from AI were also discussed. The Chair and the Secretariat agreed to review and discuss possibilities.

[Action: The Chair & Secretariat]

iii. Authorisations Working Group

4.6 The Chair asked Professor Sutton, Chair of the AWG, to update members. Professor Sutton informed members that no consultations have been considered by the AWG since the last meeting.

iv. EMF and Health Subgroup

4.7 The Chair informed members that the EMF and Health Subgroup (EAHS) held its fifth meeting on 1st February 2024. Professor de Vocht, the EAHS Chair, provided an update on the work of the subgroup. The subgroup had discussed six papers, of which two were circulated to the Committee. One paper considered the effects of radiofrequency EMF on tinnitus and migraine. The other paper was from the COSMOS study, looking at mobile phone use and headaches. Neither paper reported evidence for linking RF-EMFs with the effects studied.

v. ICRP Recommendations Subgroup

4.8 The Chair advised members that the fifth meeting of the ICRP Recommendations Subgroup (IRS) was held on 1st February 2024. Professor Sutton reported that there have been no new consultations since the November 2023 update. The ICRP consultations on PET CT and optimisation of radiation protection in digital radiology are now closed and being put forward for publication. The publication on Ethics in Radiological Protection has been approved and there are also publications on surface and near surface disposals, on public dose coefficients, and on areas contaminated by past activities that have been through consultation and are awaiting publication. The IRS also discussed the recent symposium in Tokyo. Professor Sutton reported that ICRP are expanding their analysis of uncertainties, and that revision to publication 62 around radiological protection and biomedical, human and biomedical research is at an early stage.

4.9 Professor Sutton noted that the group had reviewed four papers and circulated one to the Committee, which considers the methodology used to estimate hereditary effects in the radiological protection system. In conclusion the paper recommends further research. Members discussed the ICRP plans for producing new recommendations.

5. Information papers.

5.1 The Chair drew members' attention to the information papers and the digital links and highlighted the papers presented by the EAHS and the IRS. No other information papers were highlighted by members.

6. AOB.

6.1 No other matters were raised by members.

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 10th July 2024.