

138th COMARE MEETING, Wednesday 10th July 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 Susan McCready-Shea Dr Richard McNally Professor David Read Professor Lesley Rhodes Professor James Smith Professor David Sutton Professor Mireille Toledano Dr Chris Westcott
	Assessors:	DESNZ DHSC EA FSA HSE ONR NDA 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 138th 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 FSA assessor and the new WG assessor to their first meeting.
- 1.3 The Chair informed members that this was the last meeting for Professor Frank de Vocht, having served 10 years on COMARE. He thanked Professor de Vocht for his work and support for the Committee over this time, in particular with chairing the Cardio-/Cerebrovascular Effects Subcommittee and the EMF and Health Subgroup.

- 1.4 The Chair noted that this is also the last meeting for Dr Jane Barrett and Dr Teik Chooi Oh, thanking them both for their support of the Committee.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 Apologies were received from Dr Jane Barrett, Dr Teik Chooi Oh, Professor Graham Smith, Professor Malcom Sperrin and the assessor for NHS Scotland. The Chair reminded assessors that substitutes may attend the meeting.

2. Minutes of the 137th COMARE meeting

i. Minutes, actions & matters arising

- 2.1 The Chair asked for comments or corrections to the minutes from the 137th meeting. No comments were raised. 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 asked the UKHSA assessor for an update on the publication on performance testing of lower-cost electronic radon detectors. The UKHSA assessor confirmed that a paper has been submitted for publication. Once published, the paper will be made available to COMARE.
[Action: UKHSA]
- 2.3 The Chair reported that the secretariat has made changes to the COMARE website. The main page now has links for different sets of documents. New statements or information can be posted on the main page for a limited period. The website may be regarded as fit for purpose.
- 2.4 The Chair confirmed that he, along with six other members, will be reappointed to the Committee for a further term. A recruitment campaign is in progress, with six vacancies being advertised, requesting expertise in epidemiology, radiology, oncology, non-ionising radiation, and circadian and visual neuroscience.

3. Committee matters

i. Correspondence

- 3.1 The Chair brought members' attention to the correspondence briefing note. There have been three FOI requests since the last meeting, which were all sent to multiple recipients. There has been no mention of COMARE in Parliamentary Questions since the last meeting. Two email enquiries were handled by the secretariat. One highlighted a regulatory issue of naturally occurring radionuclides in land in Aberdeen. The second requested details of cancer rates for the Isle of Man.
- 3.2 The Committee received a letter of support from the German Commission on Radiological Protection (SSK) for the Oxford Survey of Childhood Cancers (OSCC) database. The Chair asked Dr Hill for an update on the status of the OSCC database. Dr Hill reported that work is continuing to confirm exactly what would be required for holding and managing the database. Discussions are still ongoing in Oxford.
- 3.3 The Chair asked Dr McNally for an update on the status of the National Registry of Childhood Tumours database. Dr McNally reported that a potential home may have been found, but he will check on progress.

[Action: Dr McNally]

3.4 The Chair informed members that he sent a letter of support for the 7th European Congress of the International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) to be held in Liverpool in 2026.

ii Notes

3.5 The Chair reminded members that Professor G Smith produced a draft paper on standardisation on terms relating to low doses / low activities of ionising radiation. The document has been reviewed by the ICRP Recommendations Subgroup (IRS) and revisions led by the Chair. The current version has been circulated for discussion. Comments on the draft were positive and the paper will be submitted to the Journal of Radiological Protection for publication and posted on the COMARE webpage once published.

[Action: The Chair]

iii Scoping exercise on the effects of light on human health

3.6 The Chair noted that DHSC have agreed to a scoping exercise of the available evidence on health issues associated with exposures to light. The Chair and Dr Mann had a meeting with Professor Russell Foster, who is the Head of the Nuffield Laboratory of Ophthalmology and the Sleep and Circadian Neuroscience Institute at the University of Oxford and was the special adviser to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee Inquiry on the Effects of Artificial Light and Noise on Human Health. The Chair reported that Professor Foster was enthusiastic about supporting the committee with the scoping exercise. A subgroup of the Committee will be established to take the work forward. Dr Mann confirmed that it was a positive meeting, and that sleep disturbance is a clear area for the subgroup to investigate.

4. Updates to the Committee:

i. UK research projects

4.1 Professor Toledano was asked to give a presentation on the findings of the COSMOS and SCAMP studies. Professor Toledano provided the background to the studies and reported that there have been two recent COSMOS publications - one on brain tumour risk and one on headaches in relation to mobile phone use in adults. The first publication reported no significant findings linking brain tumours with mobile phone use. In the second publication, data from the UK and Netherlands showed increased risk of headaches with SMS use. This was not linked to RF-EMF exposure but may reflect behavioural aspects of using a mobile phone. Funding has been obtained for further research to analyse mobile phone use and health effects. The main paper from the SCAMP study should be submitted for publication shortly. Additional papers are planned for publication in 2025.

4.2 Members were supportive of promoting these studies when published, noting it was important to flag negative findings.

ii. EMF and Health Subgroup

4.3 The Chair informed members that the EMF and Health Subgroup (EAHS) held its sixth meeting on 11th June 2024. The outgoing Chair of EAHS, Professor de Vocht, noted that the subgroup selected two of the information papers for COMARE. The first was the COSMOS study on mobile phone use and brain tumour risk, previously discussed by Professor Toledano, together with associated letters and responses. The second paper considered the effects of RF-EMF on male fertility and was one of the WHO review papers.

4.4 It was confirmed that Dr Kemp will take over as Chair of the EAHS, and that Professor de Vocht will remain on the subgroup. Dr Kemp noted his appreciation to Professor de Vocht for his ongoing support and expertise.

iii. ICRP Recommendations Subgroup

- 4.5 The Chair advised members that the sixth meeting of the IRS was held on 19th June 2024. The IRS Chair, Dr Susan McCready-Shea provided an update for the committee, highlighting three current consultations. There is a consultation on dose coefficients for intakes by members of the public (part 2). COMARE and the Society for Radiological Protection (SRP) previously submitted a joint response to the consultation on part 1. The second current consultation concerns organ absorbed and effective dose coefficients for common radiographic examinations. The third consultation considers radiological protection in areas contaminated by past activities. COMARE is mentioned in the consultation report in a case study on Dalgety Bay. The CWG will also consider the report. Further consultations are expected later in the year.

[Action: CWG]

iv. Environmental effects of UV radiation

- 4.6 It was agreed that the presentation by Professor Rhodes would be deferred to the November COMARE meeting.

[Action: Professor Rhodes]

- 4.7 The Scottish Government assessor provided a brief update on the work on sunbeds by the Scottish Government, noting that there has been an increase in melanoma cases in Scotland over the last 10 years. Existing guidance on sunbed legislation is being reviewed by a small working group and a paper will be presented to the Chief Medical Officer.
- 4.8 Professor Rhodes reminded members that COMARE had recently explored whether to update the 13th COMARE report on risks from UV exposure from sunbeds, but it was considered that this was not a current priority¹.

5. Information papers

- 5.1 The Chair brought the information papers and the digital information links to the Committee's attention. Papers of interest on non-ionising radiation had been highlighted by the EAHS. Additional information papers were highlighted, including a publication by Dr Martin & Professor de Vocht, an editorial by Professor Wakeford and a publication by Dr Little. Discussion of the information papers on UV would be covered by the presentation in November.

6. AOB

- 6.1 The EA assessor reported that there was a large object (second largest) with radionuclide contamination found on Sellafield beach in June 2024. More information will be provided at the next CWG meeting.

[Action: EA]

- 6.2 Dr Mann informed members of proposed changes to the travel booking system for Committee meetings.

¹ 135th COMARE meeting minutes

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

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Close of meeting

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions to the meeting. The next COMARE meeting will be held in person on 13th November 2024. The venue for the meeting will be confirmed in due course.