

COMMITTEE ON CARCINOGENICITY OF CHEMICALS IN FOOD, CONSUMER PRODUCTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Minutes of the meeting held at 11.30 am on Thursday 13th March 2025 at UKHSA Chilton.

Present

Chair: Professor D Harrison

Members: Dr E Barnes
Mr A Bhagwat
Dr M Cush
Prof S Doak online
Dr J Doe
Dr C Harris
Prof N Pearce online
Ms J Rix
Dr S Stalford
Dr L Stanley

Secretariat: Ms B Gadeberg UKHSA Scientific Secretary
Ms S Pallavi UKHSA

Sponsor: Ms C Boccia DHSC

Assessors: Dr U Mohyuddin Defra
Mr N O'Brien VMD

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ITEM 1: Announcements and apologies for absence

1. The Chair welcomed Members, and other attendees to the meeting. Apologies were received from Prof G Jenkins (COM Chair), Ms C Mulholland (FSA Secretariat), Prof J O'Brien (FSA Science Council representative) and Dr O Sepai (UKHSA assessor).
2. Dr Richard Howarth had stood down from the Committee, effective from November 2024. The Committee thanked Dr Howarth for his contributions to the work of the COC.
3. Professor Neil Pearce would finish his term of office at the end of March 2025. The Committee thanked Professor Pearce for his contributions to the work of COC.
4. Professor Shareen Doak would stand down from the COC at the end of April 2025, as she would be changing jobs to join the MHRA. Professor Doak was thanked for their contributions to the work of COC, in her time on both COC and COM.
5. The DHSC Sponsor and UKHSA Secretariat were progressing arrangements to advertise for a Chair to take office from spring 2026, and Members to fill the existing and upcoming vacancies on the Committee. Members were encouraged to circulate the vacancies to their contacts in due course.
6. The Committee flagged concern that COC Chair and Members are not remunerated for their roles on the Committee, while Members of Scientific Advisory Committees reporting to other Government Departments and Agencies, especially those requiring similar expertise to COC, are paid reading and attendance fees, in addition to travel and subsistence. This indicates a lack of fairness and equal treatment across the Committees.
7. Members were reminded to declare any interests they may have in an item before its discussion, and Members were recommended to be inclusive in reporting interests to allow the Committee and Chair to consider these and record them in the minutes.

ITEM 2: Horizon scanning discussion (CC/2025/01)

8. The paper summarised the horizon scanning development activities undertaken by COC since 2023 and reflected the position after the November 2024 meeting. Members were asked to reflect on the possible topics (described as insights) and activities to consider how to take forward horizon scanning in the future.
9. The Committee recognised the importance of horizon scanning, and the need to evaluate the process and determine actionable steps to take next. The use of the Feedly software as a means of capturing topics of ongoing discussion was a positive step, but it was noted that this was also a limitation, as it would not pick up future issues that were not yet under discussion in the public domain. Therefore, it should not of itself be considered a complete approach to horizon scanning.

10. Relevance of the topics identified to the Committee's remit was considered, as a number of the aspects had been raised that were not for COC.

11. One topic that was pertinent to COC's remit was hair relaxers and their association with ovarian cancer. It was noted that there are differences in regulation of these products between the US and the UK that would need to be considered as part of any evaluation.

12. It was noted that in considering the insights, the time was spent by the Committee, or Secretariat, on filtering topics especially ones not considered to be a public concern. However, this conclusion was often not documented in a transparent manner as no formal COC review would have been undertaken. It was agreed that if the Committee has considered a topic, and whether it is decided it is not a concern, there is insufficient information, or there are data gaps, these COC views should be recorded, possibly in a list form that could be considered a watching brief. If the Committee is requested to pick up a topic in future, such a list would be a baseline position, and what is new or what has changed can be considered. A watching brief list would also be a place to capture work of other groups activities that might be pertinent to COC, e.g. the IARC strategy for next 5 years. Such an approach would pick up the aspects that covered previously in the standing COC horizon scanning papers. It was suggested that external communication should be considered, including when topics are not considered a priority.

13. The Committee discussed its work on moving on from initiation-promotion perspective on cancer to consideration of potential for cancer risk, with the new guidance statement "A case for change: the challenge to develop a better approach to assessing risk of cancer caused by chemicals" currently in the final stages of approval and publication. It was recognised that there would remain for some time a regulatory requirement for classification of cancer, whether through the United Nations Globally Harmonised System of the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) or through IARC's evaluations. The Committee was keen to engage with HSE to feed into the GHS process to reflect the progress in this area, as well as promoting the case for change with other Government Departments and Agencies as well as relevant Expert Committees.

14. It was noted that a paper had been drafted by Dr John Doe related to the case for change, that had previously been considered by COC. It was considered timely to come back to the paper at the next meeting.

ITEM 3: COC Annual report 2024 – draft (CC/2025/02)

15. This paper presented the draft COC annual report for 2024, and Members were invited to consider whether it reflected the activities over that period.

16. It was agreed that the outcome of horizon scanning activities in 2024 should be captured. The Chair's introduction was awaited, and Members noted it was important to add context around the work of the Committee. Further comments could be provided to the Secretariat after the meeting.

17. Members were also reminded to complete their Declarations of Interest to sit in the Annual report.

ITEM 4: Any other business

COC minutes

18. It was noted that the minutes for the July 2024 and November 2024 meetings had not yet been circulated for review. These would be sent on in due course.

Matters arising from November 2024 COC meeting

19. Comments from COC on the EFSA consultation “Draft Protocol for an inventory of methodologies for assessing long-term toxicity and carcinogenicity of plant protection products, including those resulting from interactions in the product” had been submitted.

20. COC’s comments on the OECD standard project submission forms had been welcomed by the UK Human Health Co-ordinator and fed back to the OECD.

Committee communication and information sharing

21. The Committee discussed communication between meetings and sharing information. The Secretariat were investigating the feasibility of using Microsoft Teams for this and would update the Committee in due course.

ITEM 5: Date of next meeting

22. The next meeting was scheduled for 3rd July 2025 though a number of members flagged they would be unavailable. A poll would be circulated for availability through July, and the Committee updated should a better date be identified.