

~~~~~ Minutes of the 2nd Radiological Protection Advisory Committee

The 2nd meeting of the 2nd Radiological Protection Advisory Committee (RPAC) was held on Thursday 24th October 2019 at the EPA Offices, McCumiskey House, Richview, Clonskeagh, Dublin 14.

Members present: Micheál Lehane (Chair), Wayne Anderson, Anthony Bexon, Sean Curran, Aidan Meade, Sheena Notley, Mary O'Mahony, Gareth Thomas, Stephen Thomas, John Tuffy, John Upton, Luis Leon Vintro

In attendance: Stephen Fennell, Tanya Kenny, Stephanie Long, Ciara McMahon, David Pollard, Veronica Smith

Apologies: Andrew Bolas, Paul Dorfman, John Harrison, Carol Robinson, Michael Sadlier,

Scientific Secretary: Alison Dowdall

1. Welcome and Introductions

Micheál Lehane welcomed the members to the second meeting of the 2nd EPA Radiological Protection Advisory Committee (RPAC). A tour de table was held.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that an external review of the Agency is being conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). A presentation of the report to the OECD Network of Regulators will take place in November 2019 and publication of the review will take place in 2020. Micheál also outlined a number of organisational changes that had occurred in the EPA, including the move of the ORM Radiation Regulatory team to the Office of Environmental Enforcement. He explained that this move provided a more integrated approach of the main enforcement activities undertaken by the EPA. In discussing the move of Radiation Regulation to the Office of Environmental Enforcement, a committee member shared their experience of a similar move of teams in their organisation and advised of the need to continue the links between the radiation regulatory team and the other radiation teams in ORM.

The committee were updated on the new EPA function regarding public exposure to Non-Ionising Radiation. Micheál advised that the EPA's role is primarily an advisory and public information role.

Micheál also informed the Committee that following the implementation of the BSS and graded authorisation for registration and licensing, a Code of Practice on the application of the new Ionising Radiation Regulations in Dentistry has been published. A veterinary code is out for public consultation and a generic code is being developed.

The minutes from the meeting held on 4th April 2019 were approved.

2. National survey of the public's concerns about radiation

Veronica Smith gave a presentation on surveys to assess the public's concerns about radiation and requested advice on the conduct of a possible 2020 survey (including questions to be asked).

A Committee member asked if survey questions could be designed to identify topics where information is lacking. Another committee member advised that their organisation had used focus groups instead of questionnaires to assess the content for a health campaign. A member said it was important to use the results to target information appropriately and asked how information from previous surveys had been used. As one example, Ciara McMahon informed the Committee that previous surveys had identified trusted sources of public information and this had fed into national emergency planning arrangements. Stephanie Long said that a survey on levels of radon awareness had highlighted a gap between awareness and taking action. This led to a review of the EPA radon awareness campaigns to establish if they were fit for purpose and if uptake rates could be increased. It was agreed that this review would be circulated to Committee members.

Micheál summarised the discussions noting that as the number of questions in a survey should be limited, it is important to be clear on the purpose of the questions and on what approach should be used. He also noted that the results could be used to channel and design public information programmes.

3. Radon Risk Communication – learning from our experience and next steps

Alison Dowdall gave a presentation on radon risk communication. Following this presentation, there was some discussion regarding the scheme to loan digital monitors in libraries. It was noted that a balance was required between risk and reach, as a digital monitor gives a short-term indicative reading of radon levels and is not a replacement for a three-month test.

There was a query from a Committee member asking if occupational dose limits had been exceeded due to radon exposure. David Pollard replied that the workplaces most at risk from radon are underground mines and caves. In these workplaces, on-going monitoring is being carried out as well as individual dosimetry monitoring to assess exposure. It was noted that while there is now a legal requirement for employers to remediate workplaces, because of the natural environment in underground workplaces, remediation options are limited. A committee member informed the group that despite enforcement powers, remediation rates in above ground workplaces in the UK remain low.

There was some discussion regarding ways to communicate radon risk. Suggestions included using community associations such as residents' associations, housing associations, local champions and citizen scientists. A committee member pointed out that in terms of radiation risk, the main sources are radon and UV and this should be considered when developing a message. Regarding radon maps, there were suggestions to consider a map app or to use google maps in the way that air quality has been mapped in other countries. The messaging of two different radon reference levels (for homes and workplaces) was noted by a member of the committee as a challenge. There was also a suggestion on the messaging for the grant to increase take-up.

A committee member pointed out that from a public health perspective, primary prevention is most effective way to reduce radon exposure.

4. Non-Medical Imaging

A presentation on non-medical imaging was given by David Pollard. The presentation was followed by a discussion on the range of scenarios where non-medical imaging might take place. It was noted that currently there is nobody authorised in Ireland to perform non-medical imaging in Ireland but the difficulties for a practitioner in determining the motivation for the imaging were discussed. A committee member said that high level guidance on the justification of practises could be developed which would take into account individual versus collective dose. The importance of including stakeholders when drafting guidance was highlighted as this will also raise awareness. He added that guidance on optimisation could also be developed and pointed out that optimisation could be included in the EPA/HIQA MoU currently being drafted. Another member asked if a new category of registration would be required where a practice is already happening. It was noted that given then regulatory overlap, a list of practices could be drawn up and that joint EPA/HIQA guidance could be developed.

There was some discussion regarding setting dose limits for non-medical imaging, and how this fits into the Justification/Optimisation/Limitation radiation protection paradigm. The question was posed if non-medical imaging could be differentiated from medical imaging based on whether the imposition of the public dose limit is appropriate. However, it was noted that, for example, there are non-medical imaging situations where the public dose limit perhaps cannot be applied such as imaging for concealment of drugs. The overlap between medical and non-medical imaging in areas such as medical research was also noted.

5. Brexit and Nuclear Safety

Ciara McMahon gave a presentation updating the committee on Brexit and Nuclear Safety. This was followed by a discussion on the committee's concerns regarding post Brexit arrangements. A committee member said that security and supply of radioisotopes particularly for short-lived isotopes could be an issue, particularly where delays occur with the supply of short-lived radioisotopes. A member enquired about disposal of sources. There was a query regarding installation of X-Ray equipment by British firms. Tanya Kenny said that equipment installation and service companies are required to have registration in this jurisdiction, but she noted that purchasing equipment online is a new practise that needs to be considered. It was suggested that accreditation could be considered as a criterion for registration.

A committee member noted that in terms of food safety, information on radioactive releases from the UK is required for imported food. Another committee member informed the Committee that in the UK, there are concerns regarding safeguards should there be a move away from EURATOM standards post Brexit and what the difference is between IAEA and EURATOM safeguards requirements, with the UK (through ONR arrangements) complying with the IAEA safeguards standards. Ciara McMahon offered to explore this further with UK counterparts. There was another query concerning the provision of dosimetry and calibration services and it was noted that the EPA's approval system for dosimetry services and its calibration service will continue post Brexit.

6. AOB and date of next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place in April 2020 and a date will be circulated.