

PRESS RELEASE:

The Environmental Health Sub-Committee (EHSC) of West Cumbria Sites Stakeholder Group held a public meeting at Cleator Moor Civic Hall on 27th May 2010.

Mr Jim Desmond presented Sellafield Limited's preliminary assessment of radioactive discharges and measurements of radioactivity in the environment. It is estimated that in 2009, members of the public most affected by radioactivity on land received a radiation dose of about 16 microsieverts, compared with 17 microsieverts estimated for 2008. The dose received by a group of members of the public having very high seafood intake is estimated as about 140 microsieverts down from the corresponding estimate for 2008 of 170 microsieverts. This decrease was largely due to reduced activities of actinides in winkles which can arise from redistribution of sediments. All estimates of dose to members of the public in 2009 were small compared with the UK average dose from natural sources which is about 2,100 microsieverts.

Professor Steve Jones reported on some developments in the field of environmental health including the following.

The International Commission on Radiological Protection has recommended a reduced reference level for exposure to radon, a natural radioactive gas, in dwellings but the UK action level is already lower than this recommendation.

A study of childhood leukaemia incidence data from a number of national cancer registries, including the United Kingdom, after radioactive fallout from mid-twentieth century nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere found no significant increase.

A study of childhood leukaemia near Finnish nuclear power plants did not find increased incidence.

A study of tritium in marine life around the United Kingdom found high rates of enhancement of pharmaceutical company releases of organic-bound tritium in Cardiff Bay. However, enhancement rates were much lower at Sellafield and Hartlepool where tritium releases consist mainly of tritiated water. Sellafield tritium releases make very little contribution to doses to members of the public.

Mr Jim Desmond presented an update on Sellafield Limited's beach monitoring programme. The rate of finding active stones (larger than 2mm) has fallen by about one third since the programme began in 2006/7. However, additional detectors with increased sensitivity to actinides and strontium-90 have increased the rate of finds of particles with low actinide activities. On the basis of the earlier finds, the Health Protection Agency considered that no special precautionary actions were necessary regarding access to, or use of these beaches. A fresh risk assessment is expected for the Autumn of 2010. As details of finds become available, they are posted at www.sellafieldsites.com/what-we-do/featured-projects/beach-monitoring

Professor John Haywood updated the meeting on responses to a study which found raised rates of childhood leukaemia in the vicinity of German nuclear power stations. Publications by Dr Ian Fairlie in a number of journals since September 2009 have suggested incorporated radionuclides as a cause but this suggestion does not appear to explain other studies including some reported to the meeting by Professor Jones. A working group of The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment was formed to consider this topic but a report has not yet emerged.

Professor John Haywood, Chairman

Note to Editors

The Environmental Health Sub-Committee (EHSC) of the West Cumbria Sites Stakeholder Group pays particular attention to the potential impact on human health of Sellafield and the National Low-Level Waste Site near Drigg.

EHSC receives reports relating to the effects on the environment of operations on those sites and evaluates any implications for the community.

Independent experts on EHSC cross-reference the Site Operator's environmental monitoring results with those of other sources in order to ensure that possible risks are not overlooked. Moreover, they can pursue enquiries directly with the Site Operator and Government bodies in a highly informed way. As a consequence, the concerns of the community are always taken to the right people. EHSC continues its enquiries until a resolution is secured.

Meetings are generally scheduled for the last Thursdays in May and November. Minutes are placed on the website at
www.wcssg.co.uk/subcommittees/environmental-health-subcommittee