

Joint working arrangements between Health Protection Scotland (HPS) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Many impacts on human health are mediated through, or influenced by the physical environment around us. Responsibilities for managing the environment to safeguard human health have developed through many routes including public health, occupational and environmental health, planning and the regulation of industrial activity. It is an inter-disciplinary area and is best achieved through partnership.
- 1.2 This document lays out areas of cooperation and collaboration between SEPA and HPS, as they work together towards the protection of the environment and human health and contribute to the wider goals of health improvement and sustainable development.

SEPA

- 1.3 SEPA's aim is to provide an efficient and integrated environmental protection system for Scotland, which will both improve the environment and contribute to the Government's goal of sustainable development.
- 1.4 SEPA is committed to assess and understand the impacts of emissions on health, and take action to minimise such impacts within the framework established by legislation. This should encompass issues that have a significant effect on well-being such as odour and noise, where these are subject to regulation.

HPS

- 1.5 Health Protection Scotland's aim is to work in partnership with others to protect the Scottish public from being exposed to hazards that damage their health and to limit any impact on health when such exposures cannot be avoided.
- 1.6 Health Protection Scotland will carry out the following functions:
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|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| – <i>Surveillance</i> | Monitoring the health of the population and the hazards and exposures affecting it; |
| – <i>Investigation</i> | Investigating why and how people fall ill because of exposure to hazards and what can be done to prevent this; |
| – <i>Risk assessment</i> | Estimating the probability of the health of a community being damaged from exposure to a hazard; |
| – <i>Risk management</i> | Putting in place measures which reduce the risk of exposure to hazards and the impact they have on health; |
| – <i>Risk communication</i> | Informing the public about the risks to their health and what they individually or collectively can do to reduce these; |
| – <i>Emergency response and management</i> | Responding to incidents and outbreaks so as to minimise the number of cases of illness and other consequences. |

2. Areas of Joint Working

Health Protection Advisory Group

- 2.1 The Health Protection Advisory Group (HPAG) has been set up by the Scottish Executive to monitor arrangements in Scotland for protecting health. HPAG will determine priority areas for action in health protection and will advise the Chief Medical Officer on health protection matters. HPS are key players in the management of HPAG and SEPA are also represented. SEPA and HPS will liaise as appropriate on environment and health issues relevant to HPAG.

Access to information

- 2.2 Each organisation will have access to sound, science-based advice on the health impacts of environmental pollutants or access to environmental advice where appropriate from HPS and SEPA respectively. This will assist each organisation to carry out its functions and provide mutual support to each other, for example continued joint working on health contextual information for the Scottish Pollutant Release Inventory (SPRI).

Surveillance Systems

- 2.3 HPS has a large number of national surveillance systems, including systems that examine environmental health issues. SEPA contributes to these systems and in particular to the Environmental Health Surveillance System for Scotland (EHS3) and to the Scottish Environmental Incident Surveillance System (SEISS). The outputs of the systems are shared and the organisations agree to continue to collaborate in the development of these systems as well as the provision of relevant information and the sharing and discussion of the outcomes from them.
- 2.4 SEPA currently contributes to SEISS, principally on algal bloom incidents. SEPA and HPS agree to work jointly on developing the potential uses of SEISS in making information on environmental incidents more readily available and in exploring the potential of the system as a knowledge management tool for SEPA staff as well as the other stakeholders. It is agreed that both agencies should continue to explore opportunities for enhancing the access to and usability of environment and health data, using SEISS and EHS3 as vehicles. Developments should focus particularly on the use of geographic information applications, and on providing information to support health impact assessments associated with planning applications and environmental licence applications e.g. under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (PPC).
- 2.5 SEPA continue to contribute to EHS3 and will explore ways with HPS to maximise the benefits for the two organisations from the outputs of EHS3.

Development of a Joint Agenda

- 2.6 It is agreed that the agencies should develop a programme of joint work reflecting both the interests of SEPA and HPS and should explore opportunities for facilitating such joint work through joint staff appointments. It is recognised that it is in the interests of both organisations to foster closer working relationships, sharing of knowledge and expertise and experience and development of a joint agenda on environment and health issues. It is agreed to explore joint funding of appointments to ensure the ready availability of health protection staff to address urgent requests for advice and support from SEPA and to support longer term needs.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

- 2.7 SEPA and HPS have common interests in emergency preparedness and response in relation to environmental incidents. They must respond to incidents and emergencies as required by their regulatory/statutory duties. SEPA brings a wealth of knowledge on the environmental impacts of pollutants but currently expect others to provide health-related advice. HPS has knowledge on the human aspects of environmental health issues. This relationship should be strengthened to allow organisations to work together better to deal with environmental incidents and emergencies. Each organisation will need to work closely with local authorities and NHS Boards in developing preparedness the event of environmental emergencies.

Research and Development

- 2.8 HPS and SEPA agree in principle to collaborate and cooperate in so far as this is possible in the field of research. HPS are already participating in SEPA initiated SNIFFER-funded research projects

Education and Training

- 2.9 HPS and SEPA agree to collaborate, where appropriate, in education and training initiatives.

3. Other Issues

- 3.1 HPS and SEPA agree that there will be no charges made for any of the above core functions but both organisations agree that **substantial** requests for HPS (or SEPA) to do additional work which may have resource implications on behalf of the other organisation may attract appropriate fees that would be discussed and agreed in advance.
- 3.2 HPS and the SEPA agree that the joint working arrangements detailed in this paper will be reviewed regularly, at least within two years.
- 3.3 HPS and SEPA agreed that there will be regular meetings at an appropriate level to discuss areas of mutual interest and joint working and such meetings will be held no less than once a year.



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Date:

17 May 2006