

SOIL & HUMAN HEALTH



Soil & Human Health

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) is central to the nation's well-being. It also plays an important advisory and supportive role in the overall health risk assessment pertaining to contaminated land.

The creation of the HPA was proposed in a document prepared by the Chief Medical Officer of England in 2002 entitled *Getting Ahead of the Curve* and subsequently came into service in April 2003. The report highlighted the need for a central agency to give authoritative advice and support on environmental hazards, whether chemical, biological, radiation or nuclear. Under the HPA Non-Departmental Public Body Act (2004) Section 2, the following functions of the HPA are defined:

- To protect the community (or any part of the community) against infectious disease and other dangers to health;
- The prevention of the spread of infectious disease;
- The provision of assistance to any other person who exercises function in relation to these matters.

The Act also directs the HPA to advise the Secretary of State, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and Local

Authorities on matters relating to health protection and health emergency planning. In doing so, individual units within the HPA are in a position to offer specialist assistance to the statutory bodies in conducting and interpreting human-health risk assessments and in communicating the results of these to the public. The HPA is composed of several centres, including the Centre for Infection, Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response, Centre for Radiation Chemicals and Environmental Hazards. Its field services are provided by Local and Regional Services.

- Local and Regional Services (LARS) are structured around nine regional offices covering 28 local health-protection units (HPUs). These offer the first point of contact for health-related advice from the HPA and can provide support relating to likely public-health implications of exposure to environmental hazards, including contaminated land and its remediation. LARS staff combines local knowledge with specialist

advice provided by other divisions to assist in the delivery of a health-protection service. Separate structures fulfil these roles in the devolved administrations, such as the National Public Health Service for Wales, Health Protection Scotland and the health boards in Northern Ireland.

- Further advice and support is available from the aforementioned centres, including the Chemical Hazards and Poisons Division (CHaPD). CHaPD provides expert, but generic toxicological, environmental, chemical and epidemiological advice that subsequently can be tailored, in the case of contaminated land, to the site in question. CHaPD also functions as a 'tertiary structure' for providing advice and support to allied agencies and organisations, such as Health Protection Scotland and the Environment Agency.
- The Cardiff unit of CHaPD is a national centre of excellence that is responsible for developing a standardised, harmonised and consistent approach to the risk assessment of contaminated land, by **cont.**

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distribution and dissemination of relevant material, co-ordination of training activities, and audit as part of on-going governance.

- The toxicology department based at CHaPD headquarters in Chilton has the remit to provide expert toxicological advice to other units of CHaPD and LARS, as well as to Defra and Environment Agency (EA) and has a significant input to policy decisions surrounding contaminated land.

ROLE OF HPA AND CONTAMINATED LAND

The HPA has no specific statutory role within the contaminated-land framework as the primary responsibility for the identification of contaminated land rests with the local authority. However, the agency has an important advisory and supportive role to play in the overall health-risk assessment pertaining to contaminated land, and has a responsibility to advise other governmental agencies on any matters relating to the protection of communities from potential adverse health effects due to chemical exposure from contaminated land.

As the agency has no statutory power, advice provided is considered as authoritative. Consequently, one of the principle objectives of the HPA is to ensure that advice given is both consistent and in line with the best knowledge available; where evidence is equivocal or lacking, the HPA draws upon expert consensus opinion. The HPA offers an evaluation service to local authorities and HPUs, critically evaluating contaminated land public-health risk assessments. By regular evaluation of the HPA's involvement in contaminated land, it will be able to identify trends and thus identify areas where public-health guidance may be required. Co-ordination of such advice and identification of requirements is managed by the CHaPD unit based in Cardiff.

Parallel to this, the HPA also plays an active role in providing advice, alongside the EA and the Food Standards Agency (FSA), in the production of new technical documents and revisions to the non-statutory guidance, relating to both chemical and radiological contamination of sites. The toxicology department based at the CHaPD headquarters in Chilton plays a significant role in advising Defra on policy decisions related to Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and EA on the revisions of the toxicological collation series, as well as contributing to the Soil Framework Directive. In addition, the toxicology unit also provides a central source of expert toxicological advice on the health effects of chemicals in contaminated land and other environmental media to other units within CHaPD and LARS, in order to support their responsibilities regarding the risk assessment of chemicals.

Activities related to contaminated land within the HPA are overseen by a national multi-disciplinary forum (Contaminated Land Risk Advisory Forum; CLRAF) that is responsible for assisting in the

development of a standardised and consistent approach within the HPA that is authoritative, relevant, practical and achievable. The forum is made up of experts specialising in contaminated land, as well as representatives from a range of other relevant organisations, which ensures that the HPA's advice is consistent with the current best practice.

ORGANISATIONS WITH MEMBERSHIP OF HPA CLRAF

- CHaPD (Medical staff, environmental scientists and toxicologists);
- LARS;
- Environment Agency;
- Foods Standards Agency
- Association of Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental specialists;
- Environmental Industries Commission;
- Chartered Institute of Environmental Health;
- Welsh Assembly Government;
- National Public Health Service for Wales;
- Health Protection Scotland;
- British Geological Survey;
- Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services.

THE REMIT OF THE CLRAF IS:

- To provide a platform for multi-disciplinary, multi-agency discussion around contaminated land, promoting an integrated, holistic approach, consistent with sustainable communities;
- To promote a consistent local, regional and national approach, thereby promoting uniformity and standardisation;
- To draw upon global experiences, such that national practice reflects best available evidence and practice and contemporary expert consensus opinion, thereby ensuring excellence;
- To develop protocols and guidelines, such that consistency is promoted and against which activity may be audited;
- To widely disseminate conclusions and recommendations, thereby promoting good practice;
- To highlight current issues and ensure compliance with on-going training.

HPA ACTIVITIES RELATED TO CONTAMINATED LAND

Publication of guidance notes

To assist the agency in achieving a standardised response to issues surrounding contaminated-land sites, a number of documents are being produced. The function of these documents is detailed below:

Guidelines on the Human Health Risk Assessment of Contaminated Land

Guidelines and protocols are being developed for public-health professionals, the objectives of which are to present an overview of background information on processes for dealing with contaminated land and to raise awareness about the roles of different organisations and the guidance available when dealing with potential contaminated-

land sites. The document has undergone extensive internal consultation and is shortly to be released to Forum members as part of an external consultation process.

Contaminated Land Clarification Notes

The HPA will be publishing a series of clarification notes complementary to the development of guidance and protocols. Such documents are intended to project the HPA position on particular contaminants or activities related to contaminated land. They have been produced in order that HPA can provide advice in a consistent and standardised manner and are aimed at HPA staff that are involved in reviewing public-health risk assessments. Moreover, they are also intended to help local authorities and contaminated-land consultants understand the reasoning behind HPA advice and to anticipate the HPA response when consulted.

To date a clarification note on the use of Excess Lifetime Cancer Risk Estimates for Benzo(a)Pyrene has been finalised and released. It is intended that several more will be released within the next year and will then be made available on the HPA website (www.hpa.org.uk)

Contaminated Land Datasheets

The HPA is also producing a series of contaminated-land data sheets that contain basic environmental and toxicological information on a range of common contaminants in soil. These datasheets are aimed at public-health professionals and are designed to answer questions relating to the potential toxicity of the chemicals in soil and public-health issues. These documents closely partner the HPA Compendia of Chemical Hazards series and will be made available via the HPA website.

HPA Website

As part of the CHaPD section of the HPA's website, a specific section on contaminated land is under construction and will provide background information on contaminated land, as well as various other topics such as terms of reference, remediation options, case studies, policies and training activities.

CONTACTS AND MORE INFORMATION

In England, the first point of contact for advice from the HPA is the local HPU. The contact details for all HPUs are supplied on the HPA website under Local and Regional Services.

For information on the Contaminated Land Risk Advisory Forum, the contaminated-land clarification notes, advice on risk assessments or training please contact CHaPD Cardiff on email: chemicals.cardiff@hpa.org.uk
For specialist information from CHaPD's toxicology team or information on the contaminated land data sheets please contact, email: frances.pollitt@hpa.org.uk or sarah.bull@hpa.org.uk