

TO: West Glos Primary Care Trust Board

FROM: Dr Hugh Annett, Director of Public Health

DATE: 17th November 2005

SUBJECT: SECOND ANNUAL REPORT ON THE SANDHURST LONG TERM FOLLOW-UP STUDY

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform members of progress in the 20-year follow-up study of the health of local residents following a major chemical incident in 2000.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Cleansing Services Group (CSG) site at Sandhurst was a licensed chemical waste transfer station and treatment facility jointly regulated by the Environment Agency (EA) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). A fire and explosions occurred at the facility at 02.00 on Monday 30th October 2000 during severe weather conditions.

2.2 Further background information is available in the First Annual Report of the Sandhurst Long Term Follow-up Study (West Gloucestershire PCT Board minutes 18th November 2004).

2.3 Following the incident, Gloucestershire Health Authority (and subsequently West Gloucestershire PCT) undertook to set up a long term follow up study of the health of local people. The study seeks to address some of the local concerns over the long-term impact of exposure to the acute incident.

2.4 It was clear that the statistical power of such a study would be low due to the small numbers of residents involved and the lack of information about exposure. Lack of statistical power is a common occurrence in small studies of exposure incidents and reduces the ability of researchers to draw robust conclusions.

2.5 In June 2004 an independent expert in exposure assessment reviewed the study; a number of changes to improve the methodology were recommended. In July 2004 a multi-disciplinary Steering Group was set up to oversee the work of a Project Team.

3.0 STUDY PROGRESS

3.1 The Project Team commenced work on revising the study protocol but encountered further difficulties with designing a study with sufficient statistical power. Further expert advice was obtained. The Steering Group discussed the issues and it was decided that although the study was statistically weak there was sufficient benefit to be obtained to justify continuing with the study.

3.2 The study protocol has been redrafted to include all previous control groups within a new enlarged study population. A new appropriate control group is being identified within the county with the help of expert independent advice. The revised protocol will be submitted both for local ethical approval and to the national committee for monitoring flagging studies submitted under section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act (2001).

- 3.3 Reports of cancer registrations and deaths are being received on the study population. Although the data are as yet too small and incomplete to analyse, to date 64 reports have been received of cancer registrations (to May 2003) and 125 deaths (to January 2005). This number of reports is consistent with the number to be expected in a population of this size.

4.0 OTHER EXPOSURE ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The Project Team is in discussion with Dr Neil Ward of Surrey University to explore whether data collected in the Community Hair Sampling Study, which was a community initiated study following the incident, would be suitable for further analysis.

5.0 DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

- 5.1 A formal request to the Major Incident Co-ordinating Group to lift the publications embargo imposed after the incident was agreed. The PCT set up a small Publications Team in August 2005 to consider a publications strategy.
- 5.2 The PCT is co-operating with other agencies in the production of a summary report of the CSG Incident which is being co-ordinated by Sandhurst and Area Action Group.
- 5.3 The Second Annual Report will be circulated to the CSG Incident Community Response Co-ordination Group, the Local Resident Forum and to local Parish Councils. The report will also be freely available for reproduction in local publications.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the annual report.