

COMMITTEE ON THE MEDICAL EFFECTS OF AIR POLLUTANTS

COMEAP OPEN MEETINGS

1. Background

1.1 Traditionally, open meetings of Government Advisory Committees were held to allow the public to attend meetings and hear the Committee's discussion on some or all agenda items. This format of accessing such information has changed with the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act and the open publication of committee papers and minutes on the internet.

1.2 Today, open meetings still have their place and, in theory, all meetings of COMEAP are conducted as 'open meetings' and we have in the past had observers attend. However, the website does not overtly invite such requests for attendance and this could be a reason why COMEAP do not have members of the public attending their meetings.

1.3 This short paper guides members through the process of holding and conducting open meetings, with a view to the Secretariat clearly providing this information on the website. This in turn, may result in requests from the public to attend meetings. Members are asked to provide comment and to raise any questions they may have on this process.

2. General Protocol for Holding Open Meetings

2.1 Every meeting is, in theory, an open meeting despite the lack of requests from the public to attend. Other Committees, some who discuss more seemingly controversial issues, hold all their meetings as open meetings and have encountered little or no problems.

2.2 It is required that any item to be discussed at the meeting which is commercial in confidence is noted as a 'closed session' and non-members and members with declared interests have to leave the room.

Attendance Form

2.3 People who wish to attend a meeting are required to complete a form, provided on the website, which is then submitted to the Secretariat. The form asks questions of the applicant such as which item they wish to attend / why they have a particular interest in this meeting or item / who they are, where they are from etc.

Attendance

- 2.4 The attendee is noted as attending as an 'observer' and the following applies:
- Attendees are provided with tea / coffee, but not lunch.
 - Travel expenses are not paid.
 - Laptops and recording instruments are prohibited.
 - Members of the media who attend meetings need to be accompanied by a member of the DH Press office.

Security

2.5 It is unlikely that the Committee will discuss items which warrant special security arrangements. However, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides have provided information to the Secretariat on how to make such arrangements should we ever be in such a position where additional security is required.

3. Seminar / Educational-type Open Meetings

3.1 These have been trialled by the ACP and feedback suggested that the following format was successful. NOTE: this would not replace the Annual Air Pollution Meeting.

4. Format

4.1 One day meeting with presentations to 'set the scene' in the morning, with group workshops in the afternoon.

4.2 Lunch and refreshments provided for all attendees

Invitation

4.3 Invitations to such meetings are publicised via an advert placed in New Scientist with links to this advert placed on appropriate websites. Other options for advertising: local press, GP surgeries, libraries. Ministers are also invited.

Administration

4.4 This type of meeting is more intensive in terms of Secretariat preparation, and more expensive (although this might not be such a problem if we can use Skipton House facilities). Room capacity sets an upper limit on numbers. (ACP usually has 100 attendees at these sorts of meetings).

- Places are ticketed
- Papers sent out to all attendees
- Minutes are kept

5. Questions

- 1) Are members happy with the protocol for holding open meetings as described in sections 1 and 2?
- 2) Do members have any suggestions or comments regarding the protocol for holding open meetings as described in sections 1 and 2?
- 3) What are members' views on holding an educational style meeting as described in section 3 on, for example a two yearly basis?

**Secretariat
October 2008**