

Environmental Health *Scotland*

The Journal of the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland



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THE PRESIDENT'S VIEW



Lisa McCann.

I am writing this edition of the President's View following the March meeting of the REHIS Council. Meetings of the Institute's Council and committees continue to be held virtually.

The Council and I took a moment at the beginning of the Council Meeting on 6 March 2021 to remember the sudden loss of our REHIS Council Member Gordon Brown who passed away on 13 February 2021. Gordon was passionate about Environmental Health. He worked as an EHO in local authorities for many years before moving to the MOD and becoming an EHO for the Army. It was in his role as a REHIS Examiner for the subject area of Occupational Health & Safety that I mainly worked with and got to know Gordon. He will be missed by the Environmental Health community. The thoughts of myself and the Institute are with Carol Ann and their children at this most difficult time.

The President's View was not something I imagined would still be for me to write in 2021. I imagine that for all of us, 2020 was not the year we planned or hoped for. Unfortunately for many 2020 has been a difficult and trying year, so here is hoping that 2021 ends better than it began. There is hope with the continued roll out of the vaccination programme and the indicative dates we have for the easing of restrictions in Scotland.

On reflection, I have to say what a year 2020 has been for everyone. Who would have predicted COVID, and that we would be in the middle of a pandemic? Environmental Health and partners in public health are certainly at the forefront of the efforts to fight back and prevent onward spread.

Meanwhile, closer to home, we have seen the effect on small organisations, including the Institute, as we worked to combat the impacts of the pandemic and lockdown, and other restrictions. For us this included the cancellation of much anticipated events such as our Annual Environmental Health forum, postponement of the professional exams, to our first virtual AGM. In addition, we must not forget the impact on the Institute's staff.

The year 2020 also brought changes including Tom Bell retiring from his role as Chief Executive and Jackie McCabe's appointment to the post after a successful recruitment. How time flies as Jackie has been in post now for over six months! A highlight of 2020 for me was being able to present Tom with Honorary Membership at the awards ceremony/AGM in November. It was very well deserved.

I want to give my heartfelt thanks to our Elected Council Members/Charity Trustees, Presidential Team, Chief Executive and all members of the REHIS staff for their support over the past year. We have had to adapt to challenges and have had many firsts due the challenges placed by the varied restrictions, such as moving all meetings of the Council, Committees, the AGM and Training to online forums.

This leads me to thanking our Committee Chairs for their efforts in not only the work of the institute, but also our transition to new ways of working, so thanks go to Louise Cunningham, Management Committee; Evonne Bauer Membership, Education & Training Committee; Paul Bradley, Environmental Health Promotion Committee; and Colin Wallace for both the Examinations & Professional Standards Committee and the Scottish Food Safety Officers' Registration Board. My thanks to our Council Members who take on specific roles/lead on subject areas, not to mention the work of the Institute's staff and their patience and understanding while placed on furlough.

No thanks would be complete without a mention of the work of our Honorary Treasurer Martin Henry, who not only serves on various committees but provides a great deal of insight for the financial management of the Institute. Not a small task this fiscal year and likely next, given the significant challenges faced by all businesses, organisations and charities alike, the Institute included.

Our Centres have also faced challenges this year but managed to run successful events and centre AGMs. My thanks to all involved.

I also want to note the amazing work that was done by Jackie and the team to help get our Community Training Centres to be able to teach virtually and use

a blended approach when/where restrictions allow. It was interesting and encouraging to hear from trainers' perspectives in a presentation at the Environmental Health Update.

I would like to thank all our Members out there for flying the flag of Environmental Health, whether it is in the public, private or third sectors, regulatory or training. You all do your part to maintain and promote environmental health and protect public health every day. This work will

continue to be vital as we move from actively dealing with the COVID pandemic, its aftermath and move to recovery.

To finish I want to wish you all the best and let 2021 be the year we all move well along the road to fully recovering from all the trials and tribulations of the past year. I hope to be able to see all of you again in person when we can do so.

* * *

GORDON BROWN, 1963-2021



Gordon Brown.

The Institute acknowledges with sadness the death of Gordon Brown, REHIS Council Member, Examiner and Assessor. An appreciation follows:

An appreciation by Tom Stirling, friend and former colleague

The Environmental Health profession and REHIS lost a valued and respected member on Saturday 13 February this year when Gordon Brown passed away. Gordon's funeral took place on 10 March at Falkirk Crematorium.

Gordon studied Environmental Health at the University of Strathclyde, graduating in 1985. On completing his vocational training with Glasgow City Council, he took up a post with them, covering the busy city centre area, before moving on to Falkirk Council in 1989. Gordon further developed his skills and experience with Falkirk, completing various post-graduate qualifications and specialising in Food Safety and Health & Safety.

During this time, Gordon supported the work of REHIS by becoming an Examiner for the Professional Interviews in the Health and Safety Programme area, utilising the knowledge and expertise he developed in this field to support new entrants to the profession. Gordon also supported the wider aims of REHIS by lecturing on Community Training programmes in Food Safety, primarily at Forth Valley College.

In 2000, Gordon took up a post as Civilian EHO with the Ministry of Defence, covering Scotland, Northern Ireland and North of England. Gordon played a key role in supporting the Army as part of the response to the

Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2007. He later presented to the REHIS Congress on his work on this nationally significant event. He also enjoyed the challenge of researching and developing risk assessments for army deployments overseas.

Gordon used his background and experience as a Local Authority EHO to good effect, liaising with colleagues and developing an understanding of Environmental Health practice in both military and civilian settings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his knowledge of Scottish legislation and guidance, particularly where it differed from other UK administrations, meant he could give valued advice in a Scottish context to MOD colleagues.

Over the years, Gordon kept in touch with the Environmental Health community by attending REHIS seminars and the Annual Congress as well as through his involvement with the Southern Centre Management Team. He was always willing to ask challenging questions and play a full part in debates and discussions. He knew how to get across his point of view – he didn't mind ruffling feathers! Equally in wider forums, he was quick to promote the profession and the skills and knowledge that Environmental Health Practitioners can bring to many different spheres. These attributes served him well as a REHIS Council Member, a position to which he was first elected to 2015, and continued to hold.

Away from work, Gordon loved family life and holidays with his wife Carol Ann and children, Madeleine and Gavin, mostly in Scotland, with Skye and Oban counting as favourite destinations.

Gordon also enjoyed catching up with friends, especially to watch football and rugby internationals in his local pub, where he was always at the centre of the banter that inevitably flowed on these occasions.

The most telling tribute to Gordon is that from every aspect of his life, from his time at University, through the various steps along the way in his Environmental Health career, and beyond, he has gathered people who think of him as a great friend. His passing is felt by us all, and he will be sorely missed.

A NOTE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

by Jackie McCabe, Chief Executive / Director of Training



Jackie McCabe.

Welcome to this winter/spring edition of Environmental Health Scotland. Although restrictions continue across Scotland, coronavirus numbers appear to be falling and the vaccination programme is well under way so perhaps things are looking a little more positive. Not only that, but the days are getting longer and spring is certainly on the way.

The Institute's office staff are still working on a blend of home and office working. I am very appreciative of the hard work and support of the staff and their ability to cope with the changes. It has been a really tough twelve months and we are incredibly grateful to all the Institute's Council, members and approved training centres for your continued support.

The new undergraduate university course, for those wishing to pursue the profession of Environmental Health Officer, is under way at the University of the West of Scotland and the first students to complete practical training as part of the course will commence placements in September this year.

Annual CPD submissions have been received for both EHO and non-EHO members, with many Chartered EHOs including their written submission, required for each 3-year period. Karen Keeley, Director of Professional Development, has enjoyed reading many of the submissions and, with the writer's permission, some will be featured in either this or future editions of the Journal. I would encourage all EHOs to take the opportunity to achieve Chartered status within their profession, an accolade which evidences commitment to professional development.

Community training continues with many centres offering remote delivery through Zoom or Teams. The Training Advisers have been carrying out their monitoring visits remotely, with Jane Bunting even attending some remote Cooking Skills classes and

Raymond Hubbocks the Food Hygiene and Health and Safety courses. I am also delighted to advise that the Institute is now approved as an awarding body for the Scottish Certificate Personal Licence Holders (SCPLH) qualification and refresher courses. These were launched at the start of the year and already we have had centres apply to deliver them.

I am also so pleased to inform you that the secondary schools initiative, which is co-funded by the Institute and Food Standards Scotland, will be running for another year. Both REHIS Elementary Food Hygiene (SCQF 5) and REHIS Elementary Food and Health (SCQF 5) courses are being made available in digital format to Scottish secondary schools through their Home Economics departments.

In amidst of the pandemic work, the REHIS Council has been progressing many areas of work of the Institute. One is the Environmental Health Manifesto for Scotland. Ahead of the Scottish Government elections on 6 May this year, the Institute has launched its Manifesto – see flyer on pages 8 and 9, and the full document is on the Institute's website. The four challenges identified to protect and improve Scotland's environmental health and to support our communities through, and beyond, the Coronavirus pandemic are:

- Adequate capacity and training of environmental health workforce.
- Sustaining public health and ensuring a level playing field for business recovery.
- Healthier and safer communities through education, training and qualifications.
- Sustainable locally-based environmental health for now and the future.

The Institute exists to improve and protect the health and wellbeing of Scotland's people through education, training and qualifications in environmental health. The President, Lisa McCann, and I are shortly meeting with Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for Public Health and Sport, to promote the role of the Institute and environmental health.

The Institute's website is regularly updated with news items and resources to support you. If you are not already subscribed to e-alerts please do this through the home page of the website.

So, in finishing up, I would like to take this opportunity to again thank you for your continuing support and to remind you if you would like to contribute to the work of the Institute in any way please do get in touch.

VIRTUAL REALITY: TRAINING IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

by Lindsey-Anne McNeil, Southern Centre Secretary

For the past few years, the REHIS Southern Centre Committee has held a CPD event preceding the Centre AGM which has focused on the wider public health agenda and the contribution Environmental Health professionals make in our everyday roles as part of this agenda. Little did we know that 6 months on from our 2019 AGM, we would be facing the most challenging public health crisis of recent times.

As the profession has adapted to various changes and challenges as we progress through the crisis, it is clear that we have all had to embrace the use of technology to engage, connect and communicate. The Southern Centre also embraced this change by running its first ever fully virtual AGM and CPD event on 24 September 2020.

This year's CPD event was focused on the use of the Specialist Reporting Agencies Website (SRAWEB). This is the website used by Environmental Health professionals and other enforcement agencies such as the Health and Safety Executive, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency amongst others. Non-compliance with legislative requirements can result in the submission of a report to the Procurator Fiscal and it is therefore crucial that this report is competent and timely. However, the reporting system can be confusing and time consuming if you are not a regular user.

The Southern Centre was delighted to welcome along guest speaker Tim Lush, an Environmental Health Officer with Glasgow City Council, who has extensive knowledge and experience in successfully submitting prosecution reports to the Fiscal and was eager to share this knowledge with fellow professionals who may have cause to use the SRAWEB for reporting offences.

Tim talked the delegates through a number of example scenarios based on Food Law and Public Health prosecution reports. Tim then demonstrated how to successfully input this information onto the SRAWEB site to show how straightforward the process can be to submit a case to the Procurator Fiscal.

The feedback from the event was very positive and the committee would like to express its gratitude to Tim Lush for sharing his experience for the benefit of the profession and for the time taken to develop a high quality and challenging event at an extremely busy time for the profession.

Following the SRAWEB event, members of the REHIS Southern Centre attended a virtual AGM hosted by the Chair of the Southern Centre Committee, Lynn Crothers. The chair started proceedings by welcoming the President of REHIS, Lisa McCann, to say a few words on behalf of the Institute. The President thanked the members of the Southern Centre Committee and discussed the role of Environmental Health in the fight to suppress COVID-19 transmission. The President also reminded members of the CPD opportunities relating to new learning associated with any Covid-19 activities they have been involved in. Members just need to keep a log of any new legislation/guidance they have been learning and this will count towards core CPD hours.

Lynn Crothers will continue to chair the Southern Centre Committee for 2020/21, ably assisted by Lindsey-Anne McNeil and Chris Seyfried who will continue in the roles of Secretary and Vice Chair respectively. The Southern Centre is pleased to welcome Liam Petrie who has joined the committee this year. We would also like to thank Sheena Redmond, who regrettably has stepped down this year, for all of the hard work and contributions she has made to the Southern Centre over the years.

The feedback from the event suggests that there is a great deal of interest in future online training events and so the Committee will be taking this into account for planning training events this following year. As always, please get in touch if you would like to speak at, or recommend a speaker for future training events. The Committee is always keen for any suggestions in relation to particular training topics that we can develop and take forward to deliver for members. The Institute's membership encompasses practitioners from a number of different sectors and all REHIS members are welcome to participate in our events.

On the whole, a successful first virtual event for the Committee and we hope to arrange more of these to meet the future needs of the membership.



The Royal
Environmental
Health Institute
of Scotland

Environmental Health Manifesto for Scotland

Our Challenge to you

2021 is a momentous year for environmental health in Scotland. We are dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic and planning the country's recovery as well as dealing with the consequences of the EU exit. The United Nations Climate Summit (COP26) is due to take place in Glasgow and will shine light on our commitment to sustainability. Against this background, the pre-existing pressures on environmental health in the places we live, work and travel have not gone away.

The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland firmly believes that there are four key challenges to protect and improve Scotland's environmental health and to support our communities through, and beyond, the Coronavirus pandemic. The Challenges are summarised overleaf – the full manifesto is available at www.rehis.com/manifesto.

We address these challenges to politicians of all parties. The Institute is ready to work with all stakeholders to face the challenges and to improve, and protect, public health in Scotland.

Are you ready to work with us?

[Lisa McCann](#)
President



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The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland is a registered Scottish Charity, No SC009406



Our Challenge to you

Challenge 1 - Adequate capacity and training of the Environmental Health workforce

The Coronavirus pandemic, and EU exit challenges, highlight the dangers of the long-term contraction of the Environmental Health workforce and reducing numbers of new professionals starting accredited courses

How will you work with us to support the training of new environmental health professionals and to ensure that the public have the protection of a properly resourced Environmental Health Service staffed by officers trained to a high standard and able to demonstrate their competence?

Challenge 2 - Sustaining public health and ensuring a level playing field for business recovery and growth

Environmental health professionals protect the public by using Engagement, Education, Encouragement and, ultimately, Enforcement to achieve compliance with environmental health legislation.

How will you work with us to ensure we continue to protect public health, to tackle unlawful activity and ensure a fair and level playing field for legitimate business activity during and after the Coronavirus pandemic?

Challenge 3 - Healthier and safer communities through education, training and qualifications

Education, training and qualifications contribute to public health when learners gain knowledge which enables them to make appropriate choices at work or at home.

How will you work with us to ensure employers, employees and members of the public are supported through cost effective training that will help them to be safer and healthier in their environment and to adapt to the post-pandemic economy?

Challenge 4 - Sustainable locally based Environmental Health for now and the future

The Environmental Health Service in Scotland should continue to be delivered locally and be sustainably invested in to ensure that resources are aligned with Scottish priorities of health and wellbeing. Priorities for Environmental Health should be set in Scotland.

How will you work with us ensure the sustainability of locally based Environmental Health in Scotland?

Further information

REHIS is keen to work with everyone with an interest in improving and protecting public health in Scotland. If you would like to work with us, or if you want more information on the challenges facing Environmental Health in Scotland, please visit our website at www.rehis.com or contact us:

Telephone: 0131 229 2968 | E-mail: contact@rehis.com | Twitter: [@rehisscotland](https://twitter.com/rehisscotland)

COVID DIARIES

by Evonne Bauer, Executive Officer of Place and Community Planning, East Dunbartonshire Council, Chartered EHO and currently Junior Vice-President of the Institute



Evonne Bauer.

Evonne's personal contribution below discusses the different aspects of local authorities' response to this pandemic and how EHOs have been recognised as key players in the pandemic response.

Describe your work role with relevance to the pandemic

I am Executive Officer of Place and Community Planning, at East Dunbartonshire Council, and manage a strategic portfolio covering a range of council services.

My remit includes Community Protection, where the Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Licensing Enforcement and Community Safety teams lie. A further responsibility is Community Planning which has also been a key area involved in the local authority response to the public health crisis.

As a positive, and during the COVID pandemic, there have been excellent examples of joint working across a wide range of council teams and with our Community Planning Partners. Partners include the Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP), Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Board Public Health Protection Unit, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and importantly the third sector interface, communities and volunteer groups.

What have you and your teams been doing since the pandemic started?

The 'Shielding' work stream was the initial local authority response to the pandemic and I led in this work stream for East Dunbartonshire, which involved putting into place systems and processes locally, as required by Scottish Government.

Local authorities proactively contacted and offered support to all our shielding individuals (residents identified by Health Board/ GPs as being the most clinically vulnerable groups in terms of their existing health conditions and status.) Those shielding were to remain at home with the aim of minimising their risk of exposure to the virus. Government support was provided in terms of a national assistance phone line, routed to our local call handlers, and the offer included the provision of priority supermarket delivery slots and food boxes for those unable to access shops or receive support from family or friends.

Importantly, our teams complemented this support with locally developed processes and arrangements and these support streams were further extended to identify 'vulnerable' members of our communities, through housing tenants, social work referrals etc. A local food distribution centre was established in a leisure centre offering delivery of food boxes to those identified as 'vulnerable' but outwith the shielding categories, and also those not able to pay due to the impact of poverty or unemployment through COVID. Our local authority employees also provided weekly social isolation support calls to socially isolated individuals. Across East Dunbartonshire, all support service were effective and very well received.

Joint working with the third sector interface and local organisations like Citizens Advice Scotland, supported the many council teams involved in this response by providing telephone helplines, shopping assistance and prescription delivery services.

As well as being part of the aforementioned activities, the Environmental Health and Trading Standards teams worked alongside our business premises following lockdown, and during the transition through the Strategic Framework. This role is ongoing and includes providing advice and support, as well as enforcing compliance with the appropriate regulations, and all requirements of the designated levels in hospitality, non-essential retail and close contact services etc. The most significant issues are COVID risk assessments of

business operations, physical distancing, cleaning and hygiene including infection control measures.

EHOs are also working with NHS Board Public Health partners on contact tracing work for cases and contacts. Post return of schools in mid-August, there was case liaison with education colleagues on a daily basis involving contact tracing in all schools and early years establishments. Problem Assessment Groups and Incident Management Teams have also been implemented for clusters and outbreak control, as and when required.

Currently across all local authorities 'Test and Protect Support' work streams are ongoing, whereby those self-isolating locally are pro-actively contacted to ascertain any support needs. There is also assessment of financial needs including Scottish Welfare Fund and crisis grants, as appropriate, and the assessment for the Social Isolation Support grant of £500 for those unable to work and receive income because they or their child, need to self-isolate. Recently the national criteria has been relaxed which will hopefully allow increased eligibility and uptake to those experiencing the most hardship through COVID. To support and minimise child poverty many local authorities have been administering vouchers or cash payments to those families on the lowest incomes and who would normally receive free school meals/ clothing allowance. This is typically when children are absent from school self-isolating due to having had close contact with a positive COVID case, but also to provide financial support and the cover periods when educational establishments have been closed due to the Scottish restrictions.

Highlight some current challenges

Following lockdown local authorities produced recovery plans to allow resumption of services within the limits of COVID restrictions and guidance and aligned with risk assessments ensuring employee health and safety. This has involved the gradual re-introduction of services and remits, together with the continuation of the COVID response and support services. These issues in parallel have a significant impact on resources, and particularly when services have to operate in new and innovative ways, for example, one person per vehicle, limited and controlled access to offices/depots, and working remotely/from home, with reliance on less face-to-face and use of online virtual meetings to progress business.

The financial burden impact of COVID response on all local authorities is a continuing major challenge and one that will feature heavily going forward. This is despite there being access to various grant funding to cover specific services and activities.

In addition to the wider pandemic health response EHOs have been heavily involved in the enforcement

of emergency health protection regulations made in response to the serious and imminent threat to public health that has been posed by the incidence and spread of coronavirus in Scotland. These regulations, amongst other things, set out restrictions and requirements which apply in Scotland as a result of coronavirus. Local authority enforcement generally relates to the requirements which pertain to the closure of premises and other restrictions on businesses. The legislative provisions have continued to evolve throughout the course of the pandemic based on the latest public health advice.

Food Standards Scotland had advised during the pandemic period, that ministers provided flexibilities against the Food Law Code of Practice in recognition of the efforts of EHOs involved in the response. However, FSS has now given advance notice of the expectation for the Official Food Control Recovery Plan to be implemented by Councils, involving the re-commencement of a proactive food safety inspection regime, which is likely to generate very significant extra work over the coming months.

Fortunately, local authorities have been provided with Scottish Government temporary grant funding until 31 March 2022, to increase Environmental Health officer resources, and locally we are recruiting two Public Health COVID Compliance Technical Officers to support the EHO role in compliance checks across local businesses.

As a challenge, it would be remiss not to highlight the national impact of EU Exit from 1 January 2021, and the number of requirements that are different particularly with regard to importing and exporting: the UK requiring its own food safety legislation and equivalency to EU legislation; the evidence and supervision required on all food stuffs leaving for Europe as well as checks on imports coming from Europe; and the work involved with Food Standards Scotland on Border Control Posts and Export Health Certificates. The roles for Environmental Health, and for our professional colleagues in Trading Standards, cannot be underestimated.

The immediate future in this pandemic period?

In the immediate future local authorities will be supporting the Health Board and our Health and Social Care (HSCP) partners to roll out the vaccination programme for COVID through both targeted and mass vaccination centres, in particular the local arrangements and infrastructure organisation around vaccine delivery in the community setting.

Importantly, the availability and provision of testing is high on the national agenda, and both asymptomatic and symptomatic testing centres in local community areas are also being supported and often operated

by local authority colleagues, through Public Health and Local Resilience Partnerships. Environmental Health continues to be part of this core team testing programme, which it is envisaged will be required across our communities, and in many workplaces, for a long time to come.

EHOs will also continue their key public health roles in health protection around COVID such as business compliance, contact tracing and infection control.

Finally, the long-standing close professional working relationships between EHOs, with Health Boards' Public Health and CPHMs, on all matters of health protection and outbreak control planning, has been key to a successful local response.

It is important to highlight the work of the national professional Expert Working Group of EHOs and TSOs that came together to ensure consistent and effective response and interpretation of the COVID restriction and enforcement legislation. This Group has worked by feeding into, informing and shaping Scottish Government policy, and without doubt has been a vital support channel for all local authorities.

Environmental Health Officers have both locally and nationally increased professional profiles as a result of this public health crisis, and through well-developed health protection competences, range of skills and knowledge are recognised as the key players at a local level and frontline in our communities responding to this pandemic to protect public health.

* * *

UPDATE FOR SCOTTISH LICENSING QUALIFICATIONS

by Jackie McCabe, Chief Executive / Director of Training

The Scottish Government commissioned People 1st International, a not-for-profit organisation specialising in training and employee skills, to conduct an independent review of the Scottish Certificate for Personal Licence Holders (SCPLH) and Scottish Certificate for Personal Licence Holders (Refresher) (SCPLHR) qualifications to ensure they reflect up to date legislation, regulations and other requirements, and meet the needs of industry and employers.

Following extensive consultation and engagement through the establishment of a working group by People 1st International with the licensed trade, Awarding Bodies (including REHIS), training providers, Police Scotland, local authorities, licensing experts and Alcohol Focus Scotland, the content of the qualifications, including the training specification and Training, Delivery and Assessment Strategy has now been updated.

The revised qualifications were then launched on 1 December 2020 and these replace previous licensing qualifications.

These qualifications meet the requirements of the

Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 and include the topics as outlined in the qualification standard. These include an introduction to licensing, the responsible operation of licensed premises and the effect of alcohol consumption on customers and business. To be eligible for a personal licence under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 an applicant must hold the Scottish Certificate for Personal Licence Holders (SCPLH). The training certificate in itself does not constitute a personal licence.

Both these qualifications are levelled on the Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) at Level 6 and awarded 1 credit point each. To complete these qualifications learners should expect to undertake 10 hours of learning which includes a minimum of 6 hours tutor time. These qualifications are assessed by a multiple-choice examination.

The Institute is delighted to announce it is now an accredited awarding body for these qualifications and that REHIS Approved Training Centres can apply to the Institute to offer them. For more information, please contact the Institute by emailing training@rehis.com.



HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

by Tara Burgess, Local Authority Unit, Health and Safety Executive

In recent months HSE has continued working closely with Local Authority (LA) colleagues, dealing with issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic in workplaces across Scotland. This close working is highlighted by recent joint HSE/LA officer site visits to eight further education colleges in Scotland, providing assurance in the understanding and measures taken by the sector to minimise COVID-19 transmission. The visits had a focus on learning where close contact is usually required, such as in hairdressing and beauty work.

Since August last year, following the implementation of school reopening guidance, HSE inspectors also carried out a programme of COVID-secure school spot checks in Scotland.

A total of 500 schools were contacted to check they were COVID-secure and compliant with the Scottish Government's school reopening guidance, six local authorities were selected for the focus of the checks, and a proportionate number of primary schools and secondary schools were selected in each area.

Initial calls to schools revealed 80% had a good understanding on being COVID-secure. HSE undertook follow-up visits for those where compliance levels were less certain so they could offer formal advice and guidance where needed.

Our inspectors did find some common areas of concern where schools needed to make changes, such as social distancing in staff room areas, cleaning regimes and ventilation in school buildings. However, inspectors also found some novel and new examples of good practice; one primary school had considered replacing the two metre lines to separate teachers from pupils with a painting of a river, to help pupils understand the concept of not crossing it.

There's more information on being COVID-secure at www.hse.gov.uk and spot checks & inspections www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/spot-inspections.htm.

HSE's annual statistics

The HSE's latest annual statistics have now been published on our website, and they show that whilst Great Britain remains one of the safest places in the world to work, 111 people died as a result of injury at work and there were 1.6 million working people suffering from work-related stress.

Here in Scotland there were 10 fatalities, which although lower than past years remains none the less devastating for the family and friends left behind. A recent prosecution of a company in Renfrewshire brought this into sharp focus. A young dad was crushed to death by a shredding machine magnet at a recycling plant. The death was entirely preventable – he had no training in how to safely clean the machine which held the massive magnet which weighed over a tonne.

Sadly, this is a timely reminder that, while as a nation we are all working together to battle coronavirus, it is vital that employers continue to do all they can to protect their workers.

If you would like to see the full statistics they can be found on the HSE website <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/>. Scotland statistics can be found at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/regions/scotland-statistics.pdf>.

Sad News

In October we heard the sad news that HSE board member George Brechin OBE had passed away after a short illness. He was well known in the health and safety community in Scotland where he was Chair of the Partnership on Health and Safety in Scotland (PHASS).

Sarah Newton, the recently appointed chair of HSE's board, paid tribute to George, expressing her sadness and reminding us that *'HSE and those who benefit from our work owe George a huge debt of gratitude'*. Mims Davies, our Minister at Department for Work and Pensions paid further tribute, *'George was an influential figure on the HSE Board, having served for over eight years alongside Dame Judith Hackitt, Martin Temple and Sarah Newton. A board member who was extremely well respected by all who worked with him and also amongst the wide variety of HSE stakeholders. He will be greatly missed by the HSE Board and the wider organisation.'*

He will be sadly missed by all those who had the pleasure to meet and work with him in Scotland.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

■ Karen Keeley, Director of Professional Development

The professional development work of the Institute has continued through the Coronavirus pandemic. In Scotland, and across the UK, the work of Environmental Health Departments during the pandemic has been commended at Government level. Environmental Health Officers, both in the public and private sector, making use of their skills, knowledge and competence have played a key role in limiting the spread of the virus through interaction with businesses and significant participation in Test and Protect, and many other varying roles. This reinforces the place that Environmental Health Professionals hold in the multi-disciplinary core public health workforce in Scotland as highlighted in the 2015 Review of Public Health in Scotland.

Accredited University Courses

The new University of the West of Scotland programme, BSc (Hons) Environmental Health with Professional Practice, has commenced and students are progressing through the modules, many of which are being delivered in a virtual manner this year. The original University of the West of Scotland course, BSc (Hons) Environmental Health, has been subject to re-accreditation by the Institute, meaning students currently in third and fourth year are still progressing through an accredited degree course and successful graduates will be eligible to sit the Professional Examination, subject to completing practical training.

The University of Derby changed the contents of its MSc Environmental Health delivered through distance learning and the revised programme is no longer accredited. The former programme has been re-accredited meaning students completing the former programme will be eligible to sit the REHIS Professional Examination. It remains exceptionally disappointing that the University of Derby changed the content of its programme and that it no longer contains the academic elements considered essential to deliver the underpinning education required to support the Institute's Scheme of Professional Practice. The Institute will endeavour to identify a MSc course which is achievable on a part time basis, through distance learning, as the benefits of this are significant. Communication of this change was sent to the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland, for dissemination to its members, and all affected registered students have been contacted to advise them of the situation.

Professional Examination

Due to the coronavirus pandemic the October 2020

diet of professional interviews was postponed to the end of March 2021. However the "Stay At Home" message from the Scottish Government meant the date was further postponed and is now scheduled to proceed in May (18 – 20 May 2021) at the Holiday Inn, Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh. Should restrictions due to the pandemic affect the holding of the interviews in the normal manner, alternative means will be considered by the Institute nearer the time.

Presentation of Awards

Due to the cancellation of the Annual Forum in April 2020, the award of the Institute's Diploma in Environmental Health to those successful new professionals was delayed meaning that, although they sat the professional interviews in October 2019, they did not receive their Diploma Certificate until later in 2020. There was also a recipient of the SFSORB Higher Certificate in Food Premises Inspection during 2020. Huge congratulations go to the new EHOs and Food Safety Officer and a link to the virtual awards ceremony is available via the website and through <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W2yxLAsUkM>.

The amount of commitment, time and effort that goes into achieving these awards is hugely significant and new members of both professions, Environmental Health Officer and Food Safety Officer, should be very proud of their achievements.

Professional Courses

The Professional Courses of the Institute include its Updates (Food, Health & Safety, Pollution, Environmental Health), Witness Familiarisation and Crime Investigation & Statement Writing. Unfortunately the pandemic affected the running of the Pollution, Food and Health & Safety Updates in 2020. A successful Environmental Health Update was delivered in November, in conjunction with the AGM, and it is hoped those of you who managed to attend found the event beneficial. The feedback received was certainly positive and we would hope to deliver further updates in a similar virtual manner in 2021. A virtual Witness Familiarisation Course, hosted by former Procurator Fiscal, Betty Bott, was run over two morning sessions in December and again the feedback was positive. This was a first for the Institute and for Betty but given the likely progression to giving evidence in court remotely, was seen as an excellent opportunity for delegates to practice their evidence giving skills, on screen rather than in person.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Participants of the CPD Scheme, including EHO and non-EHO members, will be aware that CPD submissions for calendar year 2020 require to be with the Institute by 31 January 2021. A significant number of CPD submissions have been received and are being processed. For those due to complete a written submission, guidance is available at <https://www.rehis.com/members-area/cpd-card>.

Written submissions are due for each three-year period and can be submitted at any point within the three-year period to which they apply.

If you are a new member or newly embarking on achieving Chartered status, or simply wish a reminder of the requirements of the Scheme, a copy can be found at <https://www.rehis.com/page/scheme-continuing-professional-development-regulations-and-code-practice>.

Professional Titles of “Environmental Health Officer” and “Chartered Environmental Health Officer”

The profession of Environmental Health Officer has a longstanding reputation and the skills, knowledge and competence, which requires to be evidenced in order to achieve the professional qualification to be permitted to hold this title, are stated in the Institute’s Scheme of Professional Practice. The Institute is currently a UK Competent Authority in relation to the professional titles of Environmental Health Officer and Chartered Environmental Health Officer and these titles are ‘regulated’ by virtue of the fact that they are awarded by a professional body incorporated by Royal Charter. The legislation surrounding professional qualifications, the European Union (Recognition of Professional Qualifications) Regulations 2015, will cease to have effect and professional qualifications is an area subject to further negotiation. The Institute is maintaining contact with the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and will seek to take any appropriate measures to protect the profession in Scotland.

Official Food Controls

A recent consultation, shared in the news on the Institute’s website, from the Food Standards Agency gave details of their planned changes to the Code of Practice (England) and Practice Guidance (England). A similar consultation was available for the Northern Ireland documents and, later (with a closing date of 25 March 2021) for the Wales documents. The proposal, while maintaining the Diploma in Environmental Health and the SFSORB Higher Certificate qualifications as suitable qualifications, makes a move in the direction of a competency framework which allows for individuals not holding a professional qualification to carry out

official food controls. Individuals who hold a listed academic qualification may be considered competent to carry out official controls, subject to them meeting the requirements of the competency framework for the specific tasks they are to complete. Such individuals have not been subject to independent assessment of their skills, knowledge and competence and while Food Standards Scotland has not intimated an intention to progress in the same way, the move is of concern to the Institute. A response to the consultation was submitted by the Institute. The outcome of the consultation will be published once responses have been assessed and the proposal is that the new system is introduced early in 2021.

Scottish Food Safety Officers Registration Board (SFSORB)

The SFSORB has reviewed the current three Higher Certificate qualifications and a single, new, qualification is proposed, for new professionals. A copy of the contents of the proposed Scheme of Practical Training and associated Academic Equivalency document has been shared with relevant parties for comment and responses are currently being considered. The purpose of the revision is to provide a single qualification which evidences skills, knowledge and competence, allowing a recipient of the new qualification to undertake all Official Food Controls to a ‘first day in the job’ standard.

Consultations

Formal consultations are regularly received by the Institute and where these are relevant to environmental health activities the Institute makes response. Consultations, for which response is made, are stated in the monthly e-newsletter showing those responses submitted in the preceding month. Should members become aware of formal consultations to which they consider it would be appropriate that the Professional Institute make response, these can be forwarded to the Director of Professional Development.

If there are any queries regarding Professional Development matters, the Director of Professional Development can be contacted at kk@rehis.com.

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REHIS ANNUAL PRESENTATION OF AWARDS 2020

Annual Presentation of Awards

The annual presentation of awards, normally held at the Annual Forum each year, was unfortunately cancelled as a result of the pandemic. Diploma achievers and Highfield winners were issued their award by post with the recipients kindly submitting a photograph for a short presentation which was 'aired' prior to the AGM.

Meritorious Endeavours in Environmental Health Award

The award is presented annually to an individual or organisation who has significantly contributed to the improvement and protection of health and well-being in Scotland and/or overseas.

The recipient of the REHIS Meritorious Endeavours in Environmental Health Award for 2020 was Louise Taggart who is a well-known health and safety motivational speaker with Michael's Story. Lisa McCann and Louise were able to meet in the Institute's office back in the summer when restrictions allowed, in order for Louise to receive her award.

President's Award

The award is presented annually to an individual or organisation who has/which has significantly contributed to the improvement and protection of health and wellbeing in Scotland through their/its activities in the Institute's Community Training activities.

The recipient of the 2020 President's Award was Liz Johnson, Hygiene and Food Safety Specialist at Macphie of Glenbervie. Liz has been a registered course presenter with the Institute since 2004 and delivers Food Hygiene (Elementary and Intermediate) and HACCP training not only to their own staff members but also associated manufacturers and community participants. The Institute's senior vice-president, Louise Cunningham, was able to present Liz with her award at the Macphie site in Aberdeenshire.

The Institute would like to congratulate all the recipients and is extremely grateful to Highfield for their sponsorship. Here are all the award winners along with a selection of photographs of the recipients.

Award for Meritorious Endeavours in Environmental Health

- Louise Taggart

REHIS Diploma in Environmental Health

- Sabrina Kelly
- Suzie Lyn Mackie

- Lesley McFarlane
- Stephen McIntyre
- Liam Petrie
- Neil Rogers
- Gurhazara Singh
- Madalina Gabriela Vancea
- Alistair Carse

SFSORB Higher Certificate in Food Premises Inspection

- Susan Messem

The President's Award

- Liz Johnson, Macphie

Highfield Award for Advanced Food Hygiene

- Andrew Barnett Winner
- Janusz Stateczny Runner-up

REHIS Approved Training Centre: CHHS

Highfield Award for Intermediate Food Hygiene

- Timothy Kensett Winner

REHIS Approved Training Centre: Hospitality Training, Inverness

- Stephanie Bell Runner-up

REHIS Approved Training Centre: Macphie

Highfield Award for Advanced HACCP

- Jenny Wright Winner

REHIS Approved Training Centre: CHHS

Highfield Award for Intermediate HACCP

- Laura Lafferty Winner

REHIS Approved Training Centre: Aberdeenshire Council

Highfield Award for Advanced Health and Safety

- Peter Ager Winner

REHIS Approved Training Centre: CHHS

Highfield Award for Intermediate Health and Safety

- Helen Tait Winner

REHIS Approved Training Centre: Train Shetland

REHIS ANNUAL PRESENTATION OF AWARDS 2020



*Gurhazara Singh,
Diploma in Environmental Health.*



*Sabrina Kelly,
Diploma in Environmental Health.*



*Neil Rogers,
Diploma in Environmental Health.*



*Stephen McIntyre,
Diploma in Environmental Health.*



*Suzie Lyn Mackie,
Diploma in Environmental Health.*



*Liam Petrie,
Diploma in Environmental Health.*



*Madalina Gabriela Vancea,
Diploma in Environmental Health.*



*Lesley McFarlane,
Diploma in Environmental Health.*

REHIS ANNUAL PRESENTATION OF AWARDS 2020



*Susan Messem
SFSORB Higher Certificate in Food Premises Inspection.*



*Janusz Stateczny, Runner Up
REHIS Diploma in Advanced Food Hygiene.*



*Stephanie Bell, Runner Up
REHIS Intermediate Food Hygiene.*



*Jenny Wright
REHIS Advanced HACCP.*



*Laura Lafferty
REHIS Intermediate HACCP.*



*Peter Ager
REHIS Advanced Health and Safety.*



*Helen Tait
REHIS Intermediate Health and Safety.*

REHIS ANNUAL PRESENTATION OF AWARDS 2020



Louise Taggart receiving her award from Lisa McCann Meritorious Endeavours in Environmental Health Award.



*Liz Johnson
President's Award Recipient.*

* * *

HONORARY MEMBERSHIP OF THE INSTITUTE



Tom Bell.

At the Annual General Meeting held last year, the President of the Institute awarded Honorary Membership to Tom Bell.

Honorary Membership of the Institute may be conferred on any member of the Institute of not less than 10 years' standing and who have made a distinguished contribution to the field of Environmental Health or any aspect thereof.

Tom is probably most recognised nationally and internationally within the Environmental Health community for his role as Chief Executive of the Institute. Tom has tirelessly worked with and guided many elected members of the Institute to promote the objectives of the Institute's Royal Charter and its charitable purposes.

In conferring Tom with Honorary Membership, the Institute recognises the many years of Tom's commitment and contribution to the field of Environmental Health.

On accepting the Honorary Membership, Tom had this to say:

"Firstly, a very sincere thank you to the Institute's Council for inviting me to accept Honorary Membership of the Institute – I am honoured and delighted to accept this prestigious award.

Engaging with and learning from colleagues is fundamental to sustaining a rewarding career over many years and I have been immensely lucky throughout my career (in the City of Edinburgh Council, at the University of Edinburgh and most recently within the Institute) to have worked with, and to have been supported and mentored by, some wonderful individuals. I mentioned many of them in a previous article in the Institute's journal so I won't list them again now. Suffice to say that I am indebted to them and thank them all.

The award of Honorary Membership is hugely appreciated by me and of course by Angela, Rowan and Katie.

In finishing, I thank the Council again and wish them, Jackie and all the staff at REHIS HQ all the best for the year ahead."

THE WHO, WHEN AND HOW?

by Bernard Forteath, REHIS Council representative to IFEH



Bernard Forteath.

This submission is the result of desk top research from articles from around the world, many peer reviewed, looking at the arrival in 2019 of COVID-19 on the world public health scene. At the time of writing (October/November 2020) the pandemic is still raging, and showing little sign of abating in many parts of the world. Much of my research, and hence this submission, has come from the daily briefing from the South China Morning Post, a newspaper based in Hong Kong and which because of the particular political situation in that state provides a non-partisan look at news from that region. Hong Kong, officially the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, is a metropolitan area and special administrative region of the People's Republic of China on the eastern Pearl River Delta of the South China Sea. Other information has been taken from the World Health Organisation, and technical journals such as the Tumori Journal.

First of all what is Coronavirus/COVID? COVID-19 is the official name of the disease (Co=Coronavirus, Vi=Virus, D=Disease 19=Year of discovery). COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The COVID-19 is the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. However as I will explain later there is

some dubiety as to whether or not this is actually where coronavirus first reared its ugly head. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Initially scientists first named the virus 2019-nCov but it was later renamed SARS-CoV-2.

Illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure. Generally the symptoms that are currently being seen with COVID-19 are cough, fever, headache, new loss of taste or smell, repeated shaking with chills, sore throat, shortness of breath, and muscle pain. Some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, including older adults and people who have serious chronic medical conditions. But as the weeks turned into months and the months turn now into years more and more is being understood about how this virus developed and spread to become a pandemic in the first place. To understand a little more about how we got to where we are today we need to turn the clock back to 2019.

The World Health Organisation (that's the **WHO** in the title) on 11 March 2020 declared COVID-19 a pandemic, pointing to the over 118,000 cases of the coronavirus illness in over 110 countries and territories around the world and the sustained risk of further global spread. In some ways, declaring a pandemic is more art than science. *"Pandemics mean different things to different people,"* U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci said in February. *"It really is borderline semantics, to be honest with you."*

During multiple prior press briefings, WHO officials maintained that COVID-19 had "pandemic potential", but stopped short of declaring it one. The agency did, in January, call it a public health emergency of international concern, a slightly different label that refers to an "extraordinary event" that "constitute[s] a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease". However there was a considerable time delay in taking this action considering that the alleged first case was declared many months earlier in Wuhan, China. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is thought to have first jumped from an animal host to humans in Wuhan, China, although this is doubtful. At least at first, most cases were seen within China and among people who had travelled there, as well as those travellers' close contacts. While these cases were

concerning, they did not suggest a pandemic, because there was not significant spread outside of China. But whether or not it was the start of a pandemic in December 2019 or in January, or February 2020 clearly there was a reluctance to make a declaration until many weeks after the alleged first case was declared, and there's more than a suggestion that the WHO was slow in making this declaration. After the Ebola crisis in West Africa, the WHO had to rethink what needed to be done to better prepare for epidemics and a list of diseases was drawn up. Marion Koopmans from the University of Rotterdam was a member of the WHO advisory group for research and development. She indicated that one of the diseases on the list was called Disease X and it was there as a wake up call to start thinking about how to deal with the threats from 'new diseases'. This could be one that is threatening to the world, socially disrupting and ways need to be found to detect, control, treat and to prevent it spreading. And that is a fair description of the virus that was found in Wuhan City in late 2019. Wuhan City is situated in Hubei province which has a population of 60 million people, roughly the same as the UK.



Turning now to the '**when**'. The first case generally reported of someone in China suffering from COVID-19 can be traced back to 17 November, according to China government data. According to this data a 55 year-old from Hubei province could have been the first person to have contracted COVID-19 on 17 November. From that date onwards, one to five new cases were reported each day. By 15 December, the total number of infections stood at 27 – the first double-digit daily rise was reported on 17 December – and by 20 December, the total number of confirmed cases had reached 60. By the final day of 2019, the number of confirmed cases had risen to 266...compare that with over 82 million a year later! On the first day of 2020 it stood at 381, although as late as the 11 January 2020 Wuhan's

health authority was claiming that there were only 41 confirmed cases. But for some time it was thought that this is where COVID-19 started. The generally held view is that in late 2019 someone at the now world-famous Huanan seafood market in Wuhan was infected with a virus from an animal. At the time more than 1,100 people were employed at hundreds of food stalls over an area the size of about four soccer fields. Besides seafood and vegetables, it also sold varieties of wild animals. The rest is part of an awful history still in the making, with COVID-19 spreading from that first cluster in the capital of China's Hubei province to a pandemic that has killed hundreds of thousands worldwide. Stock footage of pangolins – a scaly mammal that looks like an anteater – have made it on to news bulletins, suggesting this animal was the staging post for the virus before it spread to humans. But there is uncertainty about several aspects of the COVID-19 origin story that scientists are trying hard to unravel, including which species passed it to a human. They are trying hard because knowing how a pandemic starts is a key to stopping the next one. But it is the "when" that is now the subject of debate. As indicated earlier the first case of COVID-19 was found in Wuhan but up until that date there were unconfirmed reports of flu like illness in and around Hubei province. Although government records were not been released to the public, they provide valuable clues about how the disease spread in its early days and the speed of its transmission. Of the first nine cases to be reported in November – four men and five women – none has been confirmed as being the first patient. They were all aged between 39 and 79, but it is unknown how many were residents of Wuhan, the capital of Hubei and the alleged epicentre of the outbreak. The WHO website indicates that the first confirmed case in China was on 8 December but this date is the date submitted to the WHO by China. A report in *The Lancet* medical journal by Chinese doctors from Wuhan, who treated the first patients, indicated that the date of first known infection was 1 December, but doctors in another hospital reported the diagnosis of a patient having contracted an unknown coronavirus on 16 December. So the information emanating from China is far from clear both from the numbers infected and the dates when patients first became ill, but it is generally recognised that there was a significant outbreak within Wuhan at the end of 2019, which continued into 2020. This outbreak was not helped by the city being known as one of the most polluted in the world. There is an annual spike in air pollution which occurs every winter due to the burning of stubble by farmers clearing land in neighbouring states and this, added to the smog caused by vehicles and factories, had an effect on the mortality rate from COVID-19. A Harvard University study found that someone living in an area of high-particulate pollution was 8 per cent more likely to die from COVID-19 than others.

As the total number of infections rose, so too did the number of cases that spread from person to person within communities around the world but the question concerning how long the virus has been around was, to a certain extent, thrown into disarray by the publication in November 2020 of an article in the Tumori Journal and the abstract of this article indicated-

'There are no robust data on the real onset of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection and spread in the prepandemic period worldwide. We investigated the presence of SARS-CoV-2 receptor-binding domain (RBD)-specific antibodies in blood samples of 959 asymptomatic individuals enrolled in a prospective lung cancer screening trial between September 2019 and March 2020 to track the date of onset, frequency, and temporal and geographic variations across the Italian regions. SARS-CoV-2 RBD-specific antibodies were detected in 111 of 959 (11.6%) individuals, starting from September 2019 (14%), with a cluster of positive cases (>30%) in the second week of February 2020 and the highest number (53.2%) in Lombardy. This study shows an unexpected very early circulation of SARS-CoV-2 among asymptomatic individuals in Italy several months before the first patient was identified, and clarifies the onset and spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Finding SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in asymptomatic people before the COVID-19 outbreak in Italy may reshape the history of pandemic.'

The results of this study indicate that SARS-CoV-2, the virus, was circulating in Italy earlier than the first official COVID-19 cases were diagnosed in the outbreak in the Lombardy region, and months before the first official reports from the Chinese authorities, which cast new light, and doubt, on the onset and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. However a more recent study published on Wednesday 9 December in Emerging Infectious Diseases, a peer-reviewed journal produced by the United States Centres of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that scientists in Italy have identified a sample of novel coronavirus collected from a young boy late last year that they say is genetically identical to the earliest strain isolated in Wuhan last year. The sample in question was taken from a young boy, originally thought to have measles, and researchers say this was a 100% match of a genome segment of the first Sars-CoV-2 viral strain collected from a seafood market worker in Wuhan on 26 December 2019. This information probably adds weight to the argument that the Chinese government did not disclose to the WHO the existence of an unknown virus causing coughs, fever and flu like symptoms until much later in 2019. This is similar to the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2004 when it was widely thought that the Chinese government was slow in informing the international community about the

existence of SARS-CoV or SARS-CoV-1. The SARS outbreak, a coronavirus related to COVID-19, infected 8,400 people across 26 countries in 2003, but did not reach pandemic proportions. With this coronavirus infection 9% of confirmed patients died but the mortality rate was much higher for those over 60 years old and with underlying health conditions, like COVID-19, with rates approaching 50%.

Let's turn to the '**How**'. COVID-19 spreads very easily from person to person, more efficiently than influenza but not as efficiently as measles. COVID-19 most commonly spreads during close contact, usually to people within 6 feet of an infected person. COVID-19 can also be spread by airborne transmission, hence the dangers of air travel and generally inadequate ventilation. And COVID-19 can also spread through contaminated surfaces, although not that commonly. The virus can survive up to 24 hours on, for example, cardboard, and even longer on hard surfaces. In the outbreak in Wuhan the infamous Huanan market thought to be the source of the virus was closed down on 1 January 2020 (some six weeks after the first case was declared). However it transpired later that it was the ground floor of the market that was closed but the market building on the eastern side has two floors, with the second level mostly occupied by retail outlets including a large concentration of shops selling spectacles. From 3 January until sometime after 6 January this second floor was open to shoppers and staff going in and out of the building each day right above the shuttered food stalls below. Not long after the market closed it was reported that the coastal province of Zhejiang reported more than 820 infections, at the time the highest outside Hubei. But the highest concentration of patients in this province was in the city of Wenzhou, over 500 miles from Wuhan, which is a centre for the manufacture of spectacles! This indicates that perhaps that the Huanan market could have been the source of another transmission route for the virus out of Wuhan. As at 9 December last year the number of confirmed cases is as follows:-

Cases as at 9/12/20	
67,873,085 Confirmed Covid-19 cases	
1,499,375 Total deaths	43,605,861 Total recovered

The greatest concentration of cases is in the United States with 15 million confirmed cases and approaching 286,000 deaths. Whether or not the number of cases and the number of deaths worldwide has peaked yet is unlikely as Hong Kong, week beginning 7 December was well into its fourth wave of COVID-19. However the

commencement, in the UK, of COVID-19 vaccinations may be a turning point, perhaps not in the number of cases, but most certainly a reduction in the number of deaths.

Lessons learned?

Delay in declaring a pandemic

The first case of COVID-19 known was declared by China on 17 November 2019. Yet it was not until 11 March 2020 that a pandemic was declared by the WHO, although it did, in January 2020, call the growing number of confirmed cases around the world a 'public health emergency of international concern'. But as the total number of infections rose, so too did the number of cases that spread from person-to-person within communities around the world. Cases were now being confirmed on every continent except Antarctica, and secondary disease hotspots were emerging in places such as Italy, Iran and South Korea. The outbreak in Italy, the first in Europe, was particularly severe. The first two cases were recorded on 30 January 2020 when two tourists from China tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 in Rome. The first laboratory confirmed case was recorded on 20 February in Lombardy region but there was no history of contact with the cases in Rome, nor had the person been abroad. Within days other cases emerged and enforced regional and national lockdown started on 8 March, three days before a pandemic was declared by the WHO. Meantime in the UK holiday makers were going to Italy, mainly for skiing, and neither quarantined nor checked when returning home. The national lockdown in the UK was not declared until 23 March, although the week before it was 'suggested' that all unnecessary social contact should cease. Many would suggest that the WHO is overly cautious when dealing with novel or 'unknown' diseases. Perhaps part of the reason may be how the WHO is funded and run.

The WHO is funded from two main sources: Member States paying their assessed contributions (countries' membership dues), and voluntary contributions from Member States and other partners. Assessed contributions (AC) are a percentage of a country's Gross Domestic Product (the percentage is agreed by the United Nations General Assembly). Member States approve them every two years at the World Health Assembly. They cover less than 20% of the total budget. The remainder of WHO's financing is in the form of voluntary contributions (VC), largely from Member States as well as from other United Nations organisations, intergovernmental organisations, philanthropic foundations, the private sector, and other sources. One of the criticisms levelled at the WHO is that it does not call out countries for not doing enough or not being open enough. This was behind US President Donald Trump's decision to leave the organisation as it did not come down on China for, as he saw it, not doing

enough to stop the spread of the virus. The USA is also concerned that it pays around ten times more than China, which only pays AC, and is, with the UK, the largest funders of the WHO.

Declaring a pandemic too early comes with significant problems and significant costs. However taking action too slowly, as I believe we did in the UK, also comes with significant public health problems and ongoing financial costs. Perhaps we should have followed the way New Zealand handled the pandemic by closing borders, although it has to be said that being an island nation, and far from the main centres of population, is an advantage to control infectious diseases. However it is fair to say there were significant delays in taking action from when the first case of COVID-19 was reported until a pandemic was declared...time lost which could have slowed down the spread of the virus.

Delay in taking the correct action to stop the spread of the virus

As already pointed out weeks/months passed, giving adequate time and opportunity for the virus to spread and establish itself before action was taken by the WHO and countries around the world. Taking the action that New Zealand took very early on could have halted the spread and saved lives. In the UK we were still allowing non essential overseas travel right into March 2020. Granted lockdown is a difficult decision but one which should have been taken sooner. Currently there are a number of investigations being carried out into where and when the outbreak started. There is increasing evidence that the Chinese Government was less than open regarding who knew what and when. Early accounts in The Wall Street Journal indicate the market was sanitised and cleared before scientists went in, although a May report in The Wall Street Journal said local officials collected samples from wild animals the day before the Huanan market was shut. But China has not said that any live wild animals from the market were tested, with only frozen animal carcasses referred to in the WHO mission's terms of reference. 'The timing is important, because if it was already disinfected, if the animals were already removed, a lot of this key information would be lost already' the report went on to say. Currently an international team of experts is preparing to head to China to investigate the origins of the outbreak. This comes at the same time as the Wuhan doctor credited for first reporting coronavirus defends China's handling of outbreak saying there was no cover up.

Questions still remain as to the preparedness for future pandemics

A year on COVID-19 is still in full flow in certain countries around the world. To mark one year on from when the

UN was first informed about the outbreak in China the WHO emergencies chief, Michael Ryan told reporters at a recent briefing 'This is a wake up call', since then COVID-19 had killed nearly 1.8 million people worldwide, out of over 80 million infected. He went on to say "It has spread around the world extremely quickly and it has affected every corner of this planet, but this is not necessarily the big one." He stressed that while the virus is "very transmissible, and it kills people ... its current case fatality (rate) is reasonably low in comparison to other emerging diseases. The fatality rate currently with Ebola Viral Disease is around 50% but case fatality rates ranged between 25% to 90% in past outbreaks. The SARS outbreak which emerged in November 2002 had around 8,400 cases and just under 1000 deaths. So it is hardly surprising that WHO officials warn that the world is far from prepared to ward off future pandemics.

Conclusion

During the period of this study many more people have contracted COVID-19 and many more have died. In the UK currently the second wave is well under way with most of the country experiencing some sort of lockdown. It is perhaps a sobering thought but Hong Kong is currently experiencing a fourth wave of COVID-19, and this in a country used to dealing with major outbreaks e.g. SARS. With the announcement of licensed vaccines coming on stream and the commencement of mass vaccination then there is some optimism that life will somehow soon be back to normal...but will it? The vaccines, although they have gone through assessment and licensing, are untried and untested in the general population. As with all viruses this one mutates and this will have an effect on the effectiveness of vaccines. In the last three weeks, as can be seen from the two charts issued by Johns Hopkins University and quoted in this paper, 15 million more people have been affected and almost 300,000 have died. Much is still to be learned about SARS-COV-2.

<i>Latest: Coronavirus death toll, infections and recoveries</i>	
82,288,651 Confirmed Covid-19 cases	
1,795,629 Total deaths	52,815,387 Total recovered

	Cases	Deaths
United States	19,653,653	340,956
India	10,244,852	148,439
Brazil	7,563,551	192,681
Russia	3,100,018	55,692
France	2,657,568	64,507
<i>Sources: Johns Hopkins University, WHO and health authorities</i>		
<i>Last updated: 31 Dec 2020, 05.24AM</i>		

Data for this paper was taken from the following sources:-

- WHO website.
- United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Johns Hopkins University.
- South China Morning Post (Hong Kong)
- The Straits Times (Singapore)
- Tumori Journal.
- The Lancet.

Addendum

All statistics quoted in this paper were correct at the time of submission. Vaccination against COVID-19 in the UK is currently well under way. In the six months to March 2021 the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has risen by 50 million and the number of deaths by 1.1 million. The pandemic is far from over.

Editor's Note:

Bernard Forteath is a Chartered EHO and one of the Council representatives on the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH). Bernard submitted this article in compliance with the REHIS Scheme of Continuing Professional Development, showing personal new learning/development in the core subject of public health.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF GIVING EVIDENCE

by Douglas Caldwell, Environmental Health Officer, Moray Council

Reflections on the experience of giving evidence at a joint Public Planning Enquiry on Clashgour and Rothes 3 wind farms at the Macdonald Highland resort, Aviemore, 9 September 2020

Introduction

In what has been a dramatic year for all of us I thought it might be worth sharing some personal experience of a joint wind farm enquiry, and in particular the conditions hearing session I took part in for the proposed Clashgour and Rothes 3 wind farms in Moray. The challenges of giving oral evidence crossing from different wind farm with different conditions in the same time slot is I feel useful to report to fellow members. I understand this was the first inquiry in this format and was being promoted by the Scottish Government as a positive economic benefit. I hope to give some insight into the time that was required in advance of the Inquiry session and the inevitable last minute machinations between lawyers representing the Council's position and two sets of lawyers each with different nuances on their own position on their development. I think it will also be useful to reflect on how preparation was impacted

by the demands of the Service on the imminent Public Health demands associated with the Covid pandemic. I will highlight challenged conditions promoted by the Council and comment on the alternatives proposed by the other developments. Of special interest to fellow noise practitioners is the promotion of the amplitude modulation condition from the IOA Acoustics Bulletin1 as opposed to the differing positions taken by each development. In addition to this it is worth commenting on the discussions in relation to Moray Council's promotion of commissioning noise monitoring with proactive monitoring thereafter, as opposed to the differing views presented by the developer's representatives.

The full article is available in the REHIS news on the Institute's website at www.rehis.com.

Editor's Note:

Douglas is a Chartered EHO and submitted the full report in compliance with the REHIS Scheme of Continuing Professional Development, showing personal new learning/development in the core subject of pollution control.

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'COVID-19: ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW?'

■ by John Crawford, FREHIS

A whimsical consideration of the organism's side of the story

Our tribe wasn't out of the headlines much for most of 2020 and to us, it seemed unfair. Our family has lived on earth as long as (and probably longer) than mankind, yet we were accused of being intent on destroying it. Nothing was further from the truth. We have no home: our family lives in the bodies of other living creatures (for us it's usually humans) in the full knowledge that they will either develop antibodies that will kill us, or they will die, and take us with them.

Either way, we only have a limited time to perpetuate ourselves by multiplying in humans as quickly as possible (your 'Millionaire' TV programme is an excellent example, where from £10, contestants can get to £1million by doubling in under 30 minutes). All it needs is one of our offspring to get to their next host via a cough, sneeze, touch, or droplet. We prefer the first two as it allows us to get straight into their eyes, mouths or noses directly, but as droplets, we can also rest for a day or two on hard surfaces until somebody picks us up and we can then get into their bodies (especially in the colder months) and start to grow.

To be fair, we don't always succeed every time we try to jump from one host to another: people wearing masks and keeping a good distance from each other present us with serious challenges, and of course if anybody picks one of us up from a hard surface and then washes their hands for long enough in hot, soapy water, we're doomed. But that doesn't happen often enough for us to be too worried: after all far too many humans think 'it won't happen to me' and ignore the advice.

We're not choosy about selecting our next host: we'll happily transfer to anybody who lets their guard down. It's not our fault that some sections of the human community are unable to cope with the health effects of our living in their bodies for a week or two, nor the fact that many of your so-called 'experts' couldn't agree on how to control us.

We've heard all sorts of things about the new 'vaccines' and 'medicines' being introduced with the intention of eliminating us, but our cousins in the flu tribe assure us that this very approach was supposed to kill them off decades ago and they're still here. And of course, your internet and social media obsessions mean that some humans who are sceptical about the use of vaccines will be able to persuade enough others to refuse to be vaccinated so that's great news for us. We also heard about 'experts' who wanted us to be allowed free access to the younger sections of the community who were supposed to have better chances of recovery (but that didn't always happen). This was exciting news for us at the time as it meant we'd have had a never-ending source of hosts for the foreseeable future: after all, we're no different from any other organism on the planet in wanting to perpetuate ourselves forever.

We accept that 'lockdowns', 'firebreaks' and 'tiered level' etc approaches have limited and constrained our spread in the human community but at the end of the day, we'll still be around and ready to get off our marks if any of these measures are relaxed too much. Our best analogy is that of sperm: many millions are created at any time but only one is needed to fertilise an egg! So if only one of our tribe was to survive all these measures and then find a new host, it will start all over again.

Nobody asked us if we wanted to be here in the first place but we are, so get used to living with us for the foreseeable future.

Editor's note:

John Crawford is an Environmental Health Officer and a past President of the Institute. He edited the Journal from 1985-1991.

PREPARING YOUR FOOD BUSINESS FOR COVID-19 OUTBREAKS AND INVESTIGATIONS

by Food Standards Scotland



Food Standards Scotland (FSS) continues to develop its COVID-19 guidance package for food businesses, which aims to support the Scottish Government's COVID-19 Framework for Decision Making (Scotland's Route Map Through and Out of the Crisis). This has recently been updated with a new document that was developed in collaboration with Public Health Scotland to support food business operators with preparing for the investigations that will take place if an outbreak of COVID-19 is suspected in the workforce.

The Investigation of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Food Businesses guidance aims to help Food Business Operators (FBOs) to better understand the investigations that will take place when an outbreak of COVID-19 is identified in their workforce, and how an Incident Management Team (IMT) will decide on the actions that need to be taken to stop the further spread of the virus in the workplace and the wider community.

Whilst it is acknowledged that every outbreak is different, and there is no single set of defined criteria that can be used in every situation to determine the required steps to protect public health, reading this guidance will assist FBOs in preparing for the types of questions that are likely to be asked during an investigation and the broad principles that inform decisions taken by the IMT, including whether a business should be closed or can remain open.

The guidance also underlines the importance of FBOs being able to demonstrate to the IMT that they have taken appropriate steps to protect their workforce from the risks of COVID-19.

Key advice for FBOs in the guidance includes:

Identify – to help identify a potential outbreak of COVID-19, maintain up-to-date records of working patterns of staff and maintain accurate sickness absence records across the whole workforce. An outbreak should be suspected if there are two or more confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the setting within 14 days, or an increase in the rate of absence due to suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Act - If there is any indication that an outbreak of COVID-19 may have occurred in the workforce (or there is an increased risk of one occurring), contact the relevant local NHS Board Health Protection Team (HPT) at the earliest opportunity. Contact details can be found here. The HPT will carry out an initial risk assessment quickly and will convene an IMT if an outbreak is suspected to confirm whether this is the case, and, if so, take over the investigation and identify appropriate action required to protect public health.

Control – understand the FBO's legal obligations with regard to COVID-19 controls and the relevant guidance documents on safe working practices during the pandemic. These are frequently updated on FSS's website for food businesses.

Prepare – understand in advance what information the IMT will require, which will include questions looking for accurate records of staff working on each shift and visitors to your site; how your workforce is organised; how employees move through the premises; plans for controlling the spread of COVID-19 leading up to the outbreak; preventative measures put in place to reduce the risks of COVID-19 at work; auditing procedures; staff PPE; cleaning procedures; how COVID-19 controls are communicated to staff and more.

Remember, where the food business is unable to provide sufficient evidence that they have effective COVID-19 measures in place, the IMT will inevitably have less confidence in the business and will require stronger action to be taken to protect public health.

In the event of food business closure or part closure, every effort will be made by the IMT to support the FBO in identifying where changes or improvements need to be made in order to minimise the risks of any further incidents. The re-opening of a premises is a decision for the IMT, together with the appropriate regulatory body.

This investigation document is part of FSS's package of practical COVID-19 guidance for food businesses, which, at time of writing, was last updated on 15 March 2021. This includes:

- Business guidance on the changes to advice and requirements around COVID-19
- COVID-19 risk assessment tool
- COVID-19 summary checklist

BROWNFIELD SITES

by Andrew Campbell, Environmental Health Officer, City of Edinburgh Council

The REHIS representative with responsibility for pollution matters attended this year's Brownfield Scotland event, supported by the Institute, which took place on 2 and 3 February 2021. It was an excellent virtual conference providing attendees with first-hand experiences and practical solutions specific to the management of brownfield and contaminated land in Scotland. The presentations were live with a great function to enable delegates to interact and network with others in a virtual face-to-face exhibition and conference lounge. There was also a virtual face-to-face roundtable session, allowing participants to discuss pertinent topics in a smaller, more participative format. This was very popular along with interactive polls, text chat and questions allowing for lively debate throughout.

There was a good mix of professionals in attendance including contaminated land and environmental health officers from local councils, regulatory agencies, brownfield consultants and contractors. The presentations were all excellent and were opened by Professor Colin Reid of Dundee University who managed to untangle the complex issues of ensuring Environmental Protection and Governance in Scotland post-Brexit. This opening presentation would have been of interest to all discipline areas across Environmental Health.

He discussed the governance gap that is going to be created post-Brexit. The European Union will no longer be providing Environmental oversight. However, Scotland has done work to fill any gaps created which varies from the other home nations. Scotland has adopted the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Bill that was passed in Holyrood at Christmas time and has received Royal assent.

Prof Reid highlighted the four important points that this bill introduces: Environmental Principles, Environmental Standards Scotland, Environmental Policy Strategy and review of Environmental Governance. This is pertinent across all areas of Environmental Health. Prof Reid made a complex legal situation very easy to understand.

Many good questions were raised with regards building back greener after COVID – are local authorities going to be resourced; how seriously will the big issues such as climate change be taken by Government; how seriously will we take environmental issues and how far will Scotland diverge from the other home nations with regards Environmental Law?

Martin McKay of Clyde Gateway provided a great example of Scotland's biggest and most ambitious regeneration

programme, a partnership between Glasgow City Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Scottish Enterprise, backed by funding and direct support from the Scottish Government. The task was to transform a site with a historic industrial legacy over a 20-year period until 2028, and to lead the way on achieving social, economic and physical change across the large site over an area of 840 hectares in the east end of Glasgow and in Rutherglen. The presentation focused on the successful brownfield land remediation of the Cuningar Loop.

Over the two days the Coal Authority provided two different presentations. One was based on how water filled mines can be utilised to provide heat for any developments above ground. Interestingly there are old water filled mine workings 1.4km below ground in some areas with a water temp at about 40 degrees. In most cases across the UK the coal mines are not so deep but still do provide enough heat for space heating any proposed developments near them. This would be in the form of ground sourced heat pumps and with no seasonal variations in the water temperatures they could provide a reliable source of heat. Clearly care and consideration would need to be given to the installation of infrastructure to ensure there were no potential gas issues.

Craig McLaren from the Royal Town Planning Institute discussed the considerable changes to the Planning process initiated by the Planning (Scotland) Bill. This Bill has begun to overhaul the old planning system. Making changes to ensure the National Planning Framework is a part of each development plan. It has scrapped Strategic Development Plans, introduced local Place plans, brought in powers to bring in an infrastructure levy, replaced Simplified Planning Zones with Simplified Development Zones and introduced more robust meaningful measures aimed at improving planning authority performance.

Craig discussed the need for the fourth National Framework. He highlighted that a significant shift is required to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045.

If Scotland is to meet its targets, some significant choices will need to be made. There is a need to rebalance the planning system so that climate change is a guiding principle for all plans and decisions and to focus our efforts on actively encouraging all developments that help to reduce emissions with focus on brownfield sites. This is not about restricting development. The aim is to help stimulate the green economy by facilitating innovation, greener design and place-based solutions.

The key points raised by Craig were often echoed by other speakers throughout the two days. Building 20-minute neighbourhoods, we can plan our homes together with everyday local infrastructure including schools, community centres, local shops and healthcare to significantly reduce the need to travel. This is not just about new buildings it is an opportunity to change in a way that also helps to transform our existing places. However, it was highlighted that these neighbourhoods may need to regenerate vacant derelict land and make them an asset to the community such as the Cuningar Loop.

There is now a stronger preference for reusing existing buildings before new development proceeds, shifting future development away from greenfield land, including actively enabling the redevelopment of vacant and derelict land. The issue of resources was raised by most people in the poll regarding the impact this will have across all the professions. Significantly strengthening policies to secure low carbon heating solutions by an expectation of low and zero carbon design and energy efficiency, for example by actively encouraging much wider use of sustainable and recycled materials in new developments. Again, this was picked up by other presenters indirectly as a gas risk if for example ground sourced heat pumps were introduced into ground with gas. Expanding green infrastructure, biodiversity and natural spaces to make our places greener, healthier and more resilient to the impacts of climate change are the areas now under focus.

It should be highlighted that the NPF4 Position Statement consultation ended on the 19 February 2021.

Deryck Irving of the Green Action Trust works with a range of private, public and third sector partners across Scotland to turn ideas into tangible change, to build more sustainable communities and a greener country. The Green Action Trust plans, collaborates and delivers positive action across the country to achieve Scotland's climate change ambitions, as well as identify and deliver opportunities for improving greenspaces in both urban and rural settings. It is specifically responsible for the delivery of the Central Scotland Green Network Plan, the largest green infrastructure project in Europe. It is a member of the Derelict and Vacant Land Task Force.

Deryck discussed the importance of using available data and making better use of it, making it easier to access and use. Whether you're an individual, community group or developer you should be able to look at a site and get access to good quality data.

Land, as part of the circular economy, is now something that can be delivered. There is a need to reform Scotland's regeneration strategy to focus on place-based regeneration and land reuse to empower communities and give the public sector a more active role in development. Make derelict sites that have been unused for a long time as a top priority in the new

National Planning Framework. Make fixing brownfield sites a priority in the next national Infrastructure Investment Plan. Make it easier to buy land for reuse, with new laws for compulsory sales orders and review the current ways land is bought and sold by the public sector.

Brownfield sites can only become effective development sites if contamination issues are addressed up front and not left to the end, by which time plans have already been proposed and so contamination is then blamed as the barrier. Cuningar Loop is an excellent example of the issues being addressed in the right order.

A good point made by a delegate was, is consideration of only 'Vacant & Derelict Land' sites enough to transform deprived urban landscapes? NPF4 wishes to encourage community engagement. Should we now be including a broader remit such as "abandoned, neglected or detrimental land" (Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015)?

Professor Dr Paul Nathanail spoke of moving to a circular land use when discussing poly and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). PFAS are a family of human-made chemicals that are found in a wide range of products used by consumers and industry. There are nearly 5,000 different types of PFAS, some of which have been more widely used and studied than others. Many PFAS are resistant to grease, oil, water, and heat. For this reason, beginning in the 1940s, PFAS have been used in a variety of applications including in stain and water-resistant fabrics and carpeting, cleaning products, paints, fire-fighting foams, even soil remediation.

It would be a difficult and time-consuming task to assess and manage risks for these substances individually, which may lead to widespread and irreversible pollution. People are mainly exposed to PFAS through drinking water, food and food packaging, dust, creams and cosmetics, PFAS-coated textiles or other consumer products. Taking precautionary actions to limit non-essential uses and promoting the use of chemicals that are 'safe-and-circular-by-design' could help limit future pollution.

Steve Wilson from RSK gave a technical presentation on mine risk assessment and gas protection measures for developments. In Scotland ground bearing slabs are commonly used so he highlighted that you must ensure your monitoring is appropriate for this build type. There should be layers, so if the slab cracks the DPM should be able to provide protection and then even insulation boards, so in theory the gas would need to find a crack in the slab, breach in the DPM, then find a gap in the insulation and then up through the concrete into a building. The importance of installing services such as drainage pipes through this was raised as a common route for gas ingress. Pipe areas should be sealed and verified at the planning stage.

Steve mentioned that a DPM of 0.5mm can be good quality and provide better protection than a gas membrane. He stressed the need to block all service ducts and be aware of how gas can travel and enter building voids. There can be a lot going on under a development site with service routes possibly changing throughout the planning stage. Any changes must be re-assessed. Developers must ensure that when foundations and drainage information has been amended that the mine gas is re investigated to confirm there is no risk. All boreholes must always be appropriately blocked and sealed.

Matt Askin of Ground Gas Solutions continued on this theme with specific case studies on social housing provided.

Dr Tom Henman provided an excellent presentation on communication linked to contaminated land. He provided comment on the Buchan and Ambrose High school campus contamination concerns. There is specific guidance with regards risk communication and contaminated land from SNIFFER Risk Communication, ITRC Risk Communication (USA) and NICOLE's Communication on Contaminated Land.

The best communication tool must be established and needs to be well resourced with a budget, for example, running drop in sessions instead of holding a large public meeting. Public meetings can be negative shouting matches or people may feel too intimidated to speak. Working with the media is important and must be pro-active. Interaction with social media is a good method to get a message out quickly but overall the communication strategy may change throughout the project and needs to be periodically reviewed.

It's important to build trust with the affected people to ensure there is a good relationship. You must be empathetic regarding their concerns such as possible

health or impacts on property value, avoid barriers between the experts and public and explain the scientific and technical issues using an easy to understand method.

How do site investigation and risk assessment outputs feed into effective risk communication? Representatives must get the science right, review project timescales and explain clearly any assumptions.

The above strategy was used in the Buchan and Ambrose High School case. The school opened in 2012, blue tinged water was raised as an issue, then health of members of staff was flagged, followed by a pupil falling ill. This was investigated and found normal standards to be met and that the health issues were not linked to the school building.

In June 2019 there was a public meeting with the council and NHS - it was displayed that the school was safe, but this did not go well and led to teacher strikes with many pupils staying away from the school. The Scottish Government got involved and investigated. They followed a good risk communication strategy and managed to explain and reduce the level of anxiety that staff and pupils had about the school environment.

Overall this was an intense and extremely informative two days. The event provided great case studies and interesting examples of good practice in Scotland. Attending the event offered improved knowledge and understanding, giving confidence in dealing with brownfield sites moving forward including preparation for many potential contamination issues. Attendance at future Brownfield Scotland events is recommended, particularly for officers who work in the areas of planning and contaminated land.

* * *

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RUN THROUGH THE FINISHING LINE

by Neil Doherty, Environmental Health Officer, Dundee City Council



The above picture is a stock image

I'll shortly walk out the door for the last time. Was that worth it, I'll think to myself? Did I use my time well? I have been an EHO for the last 25 years, but I have not done a day's work as an EHO for 25 years, so how can that be? I had a great start to my career making life-long friends at Napier College, Edinburgh with fellow students on the Sanitary Science Course. The 4-year sandwich course was a great introduction and practical way to learn and develop to become an EHO. Today, with the difficulties that further education currently face, a rethink may be required. I currently work in health and safety and 2 years ago we appointed a pupil straight from school as a modern apprentice. This individual passed the Health & Safety SVQ level 3 course and we then appointed her in a permanent post and as Health & Safety Trainee. Since then, this individual successfully completed the NEBOSH Certificate Course which involved an online exam and practical investigation and risk assessment. I have every confidence that this will result in this individual completing her Health & Safety SVQ level 5 gaining continual practical experience in health and safety earning in the future, her appointment as a fully trained and qualified Health & Safety Officer.

I worked for 18 years in environmental health and attended the REHIS Health & Safety Course at Strathclyde University, which opened doors to enable not only myself but other EHOs to join IOSH and sit further NEBOSH exams to become a Chartered member of IOSH as well as being a Chartered REHIS member. I recall at one interview for a promoted Environmental Health post early in my career being posed a brilliant question. How do you demonstrate your commitment to protecting the environment in your own personal life? There is no text book answer to this question, but it really made me think. How do we ensure that we leave this world in a better place than when we first found it? I did not get that job, but I had learnt a valuable

lesson that environmental health does not finish when we finish our working day. The philosophy and science that support our profession really influences the way we lead our daily lives, from recycling our waste, to embracing renewable energies, and considering the carbon footprint of the items we purchase to name just a few examples.

I chose to specialise in health and safety with its own specialisms, such as occupational health, behavioural safety, stress management, ergonomics, engineering the suppression of noise, controlling dust and vibration as well as minimising musculoskeletal risks associated with work activities. Health and safety is basically all about working with people to redesign the working environment to minimise risk exposure for employees. Personally, I felt that I would be better engaged working within an organisation to influence the decision-making process to ensure that health and safety was an integral component of senior managements' toolkit, to help them make businesses and organisations more efficient, effective, sustainable and profitable. The skills gained as an Environmental Health Officer, dealing directly with people, who were often under stress, to help make their lives better is a key transferable skill that has to be learnt in the field, by practicing those communication skills on a daily basis. Environmental health provides the ideal setting to learn those skills by observing your work colleagues and working alongside seasoned professionals as you were learning your trade. I feel that this still holds true today also for health and safety practitioners.

Part of the communication skill set for environmental health officers, is being good active listeners as well as being observant to get to the heart of the problem or issue, and determine the most effective way to resolve a problem or to improve a situation. We should however always explore other ways of working and look and learn from other organisations as we live in an era of constant change so we are compelled to learn from others as this world is moving fast. REHIS like IOSH both provide a fantastic framework to meet other like-minded people who are passionate about their work and are always willing to go the extra mile to make a positive difference. Meetings and events for both these organisations have provided me with invaluable learning opportunities, not just by studying the papers being presented, but through networking and identifying ideas and people that could help extend your own range of knowledge. Online meetings are liable to become the norm over the next five years and will be an invaluable source

of information. The real beauty in such meetings and discussions is that they will become more accessible for us all, as we don't need to travel further than our desk to be in touch with learned minds anywhere in the world. I have seen many changes in the workplace and the way we now work, embracing technology has enabled us all to be more efficient and effective. Only last year I learned to use Zoom, which I had previously thought was an iced lolly! I would encourage us all regardless of age, position or experience to embrace change, as that is what keeps us interested, enthusiastic, and dare I say it young.

I consider that embracing new technological advances will assist us in addressing the new and changing challenges that lie ahead, many of which we had never contemplated at the beginning of this decade. One lesson I learnt on a management course was from a senior director of the visitor attraction, the Royal Yacht Britannia, about their philosophy towards their customers. The last customer of the day required to receive exactly the same level of service as the very first customer, who was to be treated with professional respect and enthusiasm to ensure they obtained the best experience

possible. The key aspect in enjoying your job is to tell yourself this will be a good day, and achieve something every day. I think we will all remember exactly what we did on our first day of work in environmental health, so I intend to make my last working day as a senior manager in health and safety just as interesting, as we should be giving of our best on every day of our working lives. As a runner, I was always taught don't slow down as you see the finishing tape coming up, run through it as fast as you can. Retirement for me is not about slowing down but about tackling and embracing the next journey.

Editor's Note:

Neil Doherty has been a Chartered EHO since the scheme started and we wish him well in his retirement. His comments regarding a rethink of the way into the environmental health profession are timely as the new accredited university course, from September 2020, now incorporates the essential practical training for students, allowing them to achieve the element of the professional practice which has proven so challenging to achieve over recent years.

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GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL PROSECUTION

□ by Calum Melrose, Environmental Health Officer, Glasgow City Council

Alfa Wholesale Limited at 111 Lancefield Street, Glasgow G3 8HZ who operate as a wholesaler of food and groceries to the catering and retailing sector were successfully prosecuted on 26 November 2020 after an employee fell more than 5 metres through a plasterboard ceiling.

The warehouseman who had been employed for less than three weeks had been involved in retrieving stock from an elevated mezzanine area. Whilst working in this area he stepped onto an adjacent unguarded plasterboard ceiling which he fell through landing on the concrete flooring below. The employee spent seven weeks in hospital after suffering bleeding to the brain and life-changing injuries.

The incident occurred on 5 November 2017. Glasgow City Council (Environmental Health) as the Enforcing Authority investigated the circumstances which led to the accident. A report was submitted to the Procurator Fiscal recommending that the company responsible,

Alfa Wholesale Limited, be prosecuted for breaches of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Work at Height Regulations 2005.

Alfa Wholesale Limited pled guilty at Glasgow Sheriff Court to breaching Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 in that they did not ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health safety and welfare at work of their employee. The Sheriff imposed a fine of £120,000 reduced from £150,000 for an early plea.

The accident was entirely foreseeable. Employees regularly accessed the elevated area to retrieve stock which was stored adjacent to an unguarded fragile ceiling. Although risk assessments had been carried out, they did not identify the risk of falling through the plasterboard.

This was an entirely avoidable accident which has resulted in life-long consequences for the employee.

FORAGING FOR CONSUMABLES

□ Courtney Jack Craig, Environmental Health Officer, Aberdeen City Council

Introduction

The practice of foraging is one area which is becoming increasingly popular with commercial premises and households alike. However, this practice is not without its challenges.

Foraged foods are consumables which are collected by hand from their natural environment. Often food premises will enlist a company which is specialised in foraging to provide items which are more sought after such as wild mushrooms, wild seaweed, and truffles. Foraging is a labour-intensive collection method compared to the mechanised agricultural farming we are used to in this era of food production. Foraged foods can therefore demand a more premium price due to the nature of their collection.

Foraging is one area in which I had to research following on from my findings at a local restaurant during their routine food law inspection. This establishment was undertaking foraging in surrounding woodland areas and foreshores for ingredients to be used in speciality dishes.

The business had no appropriate sections within its documented food safety management system (HACCP) to identify the hazards involved with the collection, processing and selling of these products. I was also concerned by the lack of laboratory testing needed to support the safety of these products.

During my inspection of the premises the following products were identified as 'Foraged' products:

- Seaweed;
- Kelp;
- Wild Garlic;
- Mushrooms;
- Elderflowers.

The learning outcome of this research was to improve my knowledge and understanding of foraging practices. I also wanted to be able to incorporate my research into the practical work of Environmental Health with regards to Food Safety, Food Standards and Occupational Health and Safety.

I was aware when starting this research that it would have to be a collaborative exercise between myself and other governing bodies in order to gather the appropriate information to build upon my existing knowledge.

Description

Inspection Outcome

During my inspection of the premises I asked to review documentation and certification for laboratory testing to verify if the products were safe for consumption, that the processes were capable of safely extending durability, and that the durability applied to said products were correct.

I was disappointed to note that senior staff within the premises had no understanding of the legal requirements applicable to a food business within Scotland. Staff indicated that laboratory testing had not been carried out and there were no formal documents to verify the products safety.

As part of the documented food safety management system (FSMS) I had expected the business to have considered the risks associated with both collecting, storing and processing foraged for food products.

As with any food business suitable controls must be implemented to address the risks identified within this document. It was apparent during my visit that the Food Business Operator (FBO) or staff had not identified any risks therefore felt a detailed FSMS was excessive for the products being collected.

I explained to the FBO that the foraging activities should be an integral part of the FSMS. In addition, I would expect the products to have been tested by a UKAS accredited laboratory to ascertain both their safety and appropriate shelf life.

During this visit I made it clear that all products which are independently sourced and picked (foraged for by staff) undergo testing by a UKAS accredited laboratory to ensure the products are safe for human consumption, correct shelf lives are established and that any processing is suitable in the production of safe food.

Once the testing of these products had been completed, I requested that the laboratory test reports be sent to myself for review.

As there was no relevant documentation onsite at the time of my inspection and staff could not provide evidence that the foraged foods were safe for consumption all products of this nature were voluntarily disposed at the time of the visit. These items were defaced with detergent products as they were placed into the waste receptacles to ensure they could not re-enter the food chain intentionally or unintentionally.

A written undertaking was signed by the FBO and Head Chef to cease all foraging practices until such time that there was an appropriate FSMS identifying the relevant hazards for each foraged-for-food item and relevant laboratory tests had been carried out. The Environmental Health Service and I would have to be satisfied that these products were safe for consumption, before the practice would be allowed to recommence.

It was also agreed that in the meantime all food items and ingredients would be sourced from suppliers which can prove the safety of their products.

Research

Upon returning to the office I was able to begin my research into foraged-for-food products and the associated risks involved with said practice. I had identified some key areas of research which I thought would give me a healthy base knowledge going forward with my inspections:

- Health and Safety risks associated with foraging practices;
- Risks associated with consumption of foraged food products (Physical, Biological and Chemical contamination);
- Identification of fungi.

Whilst speaking to staff onsite about the foraging practices I was concerned that health and safety did not appear to be a high priority. There were no relevant risk assessments for staff tasked with foraging for food which often took place in remote areas of the countryside or foreshore.

It was clear during my research that although food safety was my main concern various other factors had to be considered:

- Staff health and safety when foraging;
- Staff knowledge and identification skills;
- Land ownership details;
- Variation of foraged for products;
- Local authority boundaries and knowledge of activities.

The Crown Estate: Foreshore

Following on from this research I contacted Marine Scotland and The Crown Estate to ascertain ownership of the foreshore which was being used for foraging purposes. The products being foraged for on the foreshore were kelp and seaweed.

Whilst carrying out this research I was able to find the most appropriate contact. This contact was an employee of Bidwells LLP acting on behalf of The Crown Estate

who notified me that there was no knowledge of foraging activities taking place within the specified foreshore.

The email also detailed that there is no general public right to collect seaweed from the foreshore or seabed. In terms of the Coast Protection Act 1949, it is illegal to remove seaweed which is protecting a beach and additional restrictions may particularly apply to sites affected by conservation designations. Seaweed which has naturally been cast by storms above the mean high-water mark of spring tides may be collectable. However, in that case being above MHWS, it would not be on the foreshore and, by definition would no longer be situated on Crown Estate Scotland's Coastal Estate. Collection of seaweed from Crown foreshore or seabed would require the relevant consent.

During my inspection staff had highlighted to me that the kelp and seaweed must be fresh to be suitable for collection and consumption. As a result, any kelp or seaweed which had been cast by storms or adverse weather was unfit for collection. This meant that staff were actively collecting seaweed and kelp which was still attached to the rock beds of the foreshore. It was apparent through my research that this poor practice can greatly affect the biosystem of the area and damaged beach defences.

Private Land: Forestry Areas

It was also clear from the information gathered from staff during the inspection of the premises that areas used for land-based foraging were not open to the public. These areas appeared to be privately owned or controlled by the forestry commission. When reading into this it became clear that foraging practices were prohibited unless expressly given consent by the land owners.

Neighbouring Local Authority Collaboration

The identified section of the foreshore being used for foraging was located within a neighbouring local authority boundary. Therefore, I was quick to contact our colleagues in Aberdeenshire Council to notify them of the foraging activities. This process was carried out with the upmost care to ensure sensitive details of the business were protected and were not unnecessarily disclosed to other parties.

This was a collaborative working exercise between two neighbouring local authorities to gather as much relevant information on activities which concerned both parties. It was apparent that our colleagues in Aberdeenshire were unaware of any foraging activities taking place within this section of the foreshore.

By highlighting this to them they were able to investigate further and determine the known uses of kelp and seaweed from that specific site.

This exercise was useful in many ways as it allowed each local authority to work in a collaborative manner and share information and knowledge in a very specific field. I was able to gather slightly more information regarding the geographical locations and terrain in which staff from the food premises were being exposed to during their foraging practices.

Fungi Identification: Spore Print

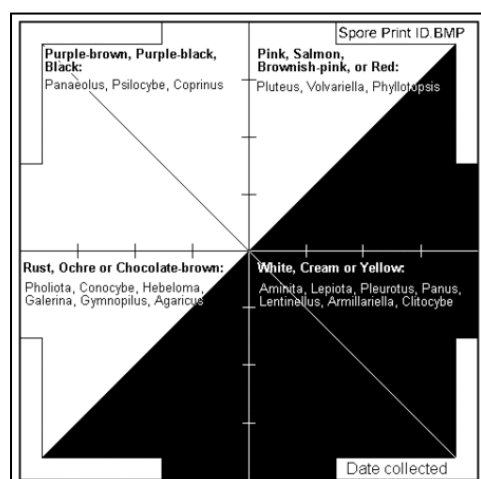
During my research I learned about fungi identification through spore printing techniques. Spore printing is a method of fungi identification achieved by allowing the spores of a fungal fruit body to fall onto a surface underneath. This method of identification is widely used by foragers and consists of placing the spore-producing surface flat on a sheet of dark and white paper or on a sheet of clear, stiff plastic which facilitates moving the spore print to a darker or lighter surface to improve contrast.

The mushroom is left for several hours, often overnight, in this manner. Some guides advise using a moisture-resistant enclosure, like a glass or jar, to contain the mushroom during printing. If the mushroom is to be preserved, a small hole can be made in the spore print paper rather than cutting the stipe. When the mushroom is removed, the colour of the spores should be visible.

Mycologists often use glass slides, which allow for quick examination of spores under a microscope. A mushroom cannot be identified from its spore print alone; the spore print is only one characteristic used in making a taxonomic determination.

It is important to note that spore prints are not always successful as some mushrooms may be too young or old to produce spores. This may not be the most efficient way of identification if a large quantity of mushrooms is to be collected for commercial use.

A printable chart to make a spore print and start identification:



Contamination of Products

As foraged-for-food items are wild and located within

areas that may not receive the same protection as commercial agriculture land, they are subject to various forms of contamination. Contamination from wild animal urine and faecal matter was a large concern for mushroom products which lie low and often close to ground level.

As for the area in which the seaweed and kelp collection was taking place it was concerning to note that an operational harbour and sewage outlet were placed not far from the collection site. With the potential contamination of the product from oil leaks from the fishing vessels and raw sewage from the outlet pipe.

Without adequate controls and protection these foraged items were at risk of being grossly contaminated. The nature of this contamination would not only render the items unsuitable for consumption but would put the staff collecting the items at further risk.

Considerations

As I have noted in the above sections many areas of concern were highlighted during my inspection and subsequent research.

It was extremely important to me as an EHO to ensure the business was being educated throughout this process and fully understood the areas of concern.

Outcomes

The outcome of my research and collaborative work with other parties was an organised meeting between myself, my line manager, the food business operator (FBO) and head chef. As Environmental Health Services are expected to work towards educating food businesses as well as carrying out enforcement tasks, I wanted to be able to pass on information which would be beneficial to the business.

Throughout my research I was able to compile various materials which would be of great value when meeting with the FBO and head chef. This information would not only focus on the importance of complying with food law legislation but highlight the various aspects of foraging which would have to be integrated into the food businesses existing systems.

In the arranged meeting I was able to present these various documents to the FBO and head chef and talk through the areas of concern whilst highlighting the importance of controlling such risks.

When presented with this information it was clear to the FBO and head chef that the practice of foraging was not as simple as expected. By educating them both on the various risks involved with the practice of foraging it gave them a clear understanding of our concerns from a food law and health and safety perspective.

Without this research it would have been a much less informative exercise for the FBO and head chef.

Conclusion

In conclusion to my period of research, collaborative work and final food business meeting I was pleased that the information gathered strengthened our case against foraging for consumables for use in a commercial setting. It was agreed upon by myself and my line manager that the food premises would need to cease all foraging practices until such time they could complete the following:

- Formulate an appropriate FSMS (Base on HACCP principles) which adequately identified the hazards involved in using foraged for food products.
- Identify the control measures needed to be in place to ensure safe food was being produced;
- Formulate health and safety risk assessments identifying the risks involved with foraging practices and the controls which would be put in place to protect staff;
- Obtain the appropriate laboratory testing for durability and food safety;
- Obtain the relevant permissions for use of land and foreshore for foraging practices.

References

Whilst researching I was able to find various documents and websites which greatly helped in understanding the intricacies of foraging. These documents and websites are as follows:

- The Scottish Wild Mushroom Code.
- Wild Seaweed Harvesting Scoping Report.

- The Crown Estate: <https://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/>.
- Food Standards Scotland: <https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/>.
- British Mycology Society: <https://www.britmycolsoc.org.uk/>.
- Forestry Commission Scotland: <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/blog/sustainable-foraging?highlight=foraging>.
- The Scottish Fungi Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/scottishfungi/>.
- Scottish Outdoor Access Code: <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/act-and-access-code>.
- Galloway Wild Foods: <http://www.gallowaywildfoods.com/an-introduction-to-seaweed-foraging/>.
- Marine Scotland - Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of wild seaweed harvesting: <http://marine.gov.scot/information/strategic-environmental-assessment-sea-wild-seaweed-harvesting>.
- Woodland Trust: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/things-to-do/foraging/foraging-guidelines/>.

Editor's Note:

Courtney is a Chartered EHO and submitted this article in compliance with the REHIS Scheme of Continuing Professional Development, showing personal new learning/development in the core subjects of food safety and food standards.

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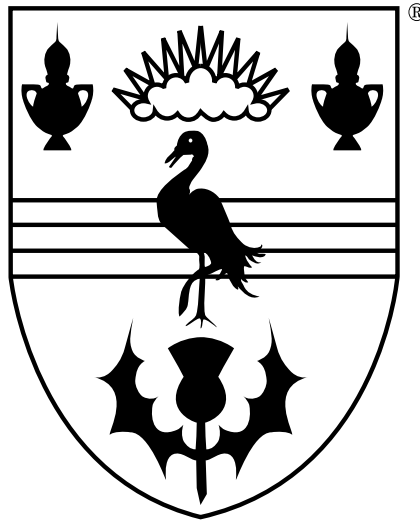
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