Happy 60th Birthday NHS Scotland

It will be the 60th anniversary of the NHS on 5 July 2008 and a number of local and national events looking back at the last 60 years will be held across Scotland. These events will take place throughout the year, however the majority will be held on or around 5 July.

Further information from the Scottish Government website www.scotland.gov.uk.

Public Health Bill - Progress

The Scottish Government’s Public Health etc (Scotland) Bill has been passed by MSPs in the Parliament with the aim of offering better protection from the threat of infectious diseases and contamination.

The Bill’s provisions strengthen health board and local authority powers to act when individuals, premises or any item pose a major risk to public health.

The Bill also regulates the use of sunbeds and will ban the use of sunbeds by under 18s, will ban the sale or hire of a sunbed to anyone under 18 and will require sunbed operators to provide users with information about the health risks of sunbed use.

Malawi Technical Visit Report

Young Samanyika, a Malawian Environmental Health Officer and Interim Board Member of the Malawian Environmental Health Association, enjoyed a two week technical visit to Scotland in April and passes on his sincere thanks to all who assisted him. Copies of Young’s post-visit report are available from the REHIS office.

Action on Scotland’s drink ‘time bomb’

The Scottish Government has launched its new approach to tackling alcohol misuse with the aim of changing Scotland’s relationship with drink. Key proposals in the consultation document include raising the minimum age for off-sales alcohol purchases to 21; setting a minimum price at which a unit of alcohol can be sold; ending ‘three for the price of two’ type promotions, which encourage impulse buying of extra alcohol; introducing a ‘social responsibility fee’ for some alcohol retailers to help pay for the consequences of alcohol misuse and reduce the burden on the general taxpayer; introducing alcohol-only checkouts in large off-sales premises, so that alcohol, like cigarettes, is thought of as a special case and not ‘just another product’; and, confirmation that a record £85 million increase in alcohol prevention, treatment and support services, bringing total spend to £120 million over the next three years will be available.

A range of statistics have been collated to reinforce the need for a new approach to tackling alcohol misuse. These statistics include the total cost of alcohol misuse in Scotland being estimated at £2.25 billion per year - £500 for every adult living in Scotland; alcohol-related visits to Scottish hospitals have increased by almost 50 per cent over the last decade and alcohol-related death rates have more than doubled; Scotland has one of the fastest growing liver cirrhosis death rates in the world at a time when cirrhosis rates in most of Western Europe are falling; almost half (45 per cent) of Scottish prisoners in 2007 said they were drunk at the time of the offence; 95 per cent of respondents to the Scottish Crime and Victimisation Survey saw alcohol abuse in Scotland as a problem; alcohol is a contributory factor in one in three divorces; and, 65,000 children are living with a parent or carer who has an alcohol problem.
Following the consultation, the Scottish Government envisages legislating in time for many of the measures to coincide with the new Licensing Act coming into force on 1 September 2009.

Bernard Forteath inaugurated as IFEH President

Bernard Forteath was inaugurated as President of the International Federation of Environmental Health at the Gala Congress Dinner. Bernard will be well known to many involved in the fields of environmental health and public health and is currently a Past President of REHIS.

Action to stub out smoking

Displays of cigarettes in shops are set to become a thing of the past as part of the Scottish Government’s continuing drive to stop smoking and to make Scotland healthier.

Public Health Minister, Shona Robison, recently outlined the plans to the Scottish Parliament as she unveiled Scotland’s Future is Smoke-free, A Smoking Prevention Action Plan. The proposals, backed by £9 million over three years, include legislating to restrict the display of cigarettes and other tobacco products at points of sale; updating statutory controls on the sale of tobacco products, with a view to introducing licensing and sanctions such as cautions and fixed penalty notices; considering issues surrounding outlawing the sale of cigarettes in packs of ten and further steps to reduce underage sales from vending machines; introducing a scheme for councils to more vigorously enforce tobacco sales laws; cracking down on smuggled and counterfeit cigarettes, in collaboration with Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs; working with the UK Government and devolved administrations to consider using plain packaging for cigarettes; and, stepping up education in schools and other settings to make clear the risks associated with smoking.

Celebrating a Milestone in Food Safety Training

South Lanarkshire Council is a REHIS Approved Training Centre and has been presenting the REHIS Elementary Food Hygiene Course to local businesses for almost ten years. In May, Caroline Duris, the 5,000th person to have successfully completed the course was presented with her Elementary Food Hygiene Certificate. Caroline, an employee of Alexander Young Bakers in Hamilton, was presented with her certificate at a special event hosted by Councillor Gerry Convery, Chair of Community Resources, South Lanarkshire Council.

Spotlight on…The Healthy Environment Network

The Healthy Environment Network (HEN) encourages multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working to address issues around the
environment and health. It takes a broad definition of the environment and its influences on health. Lynsey McNair, a member of the Institute’s Northern Centre Management Committee, represents REHIS on HEN. This article outlines the Network’s approach, remit, functions and membership.

Scope
HEN recognises that health is the result of a complex interaction of a number of factors, including the physical, social and economic environments in which individuals live and work. The physical environment exerts its influence on health directly, indirectly and in association with other factors. One of the underlying principles of the Network is the recognition of sustainability of the environment as a way of protecting the health of future generations and the need to take a long-term view.

Approach
HEN provides a forum for a largely informal interface between organisations and professions whose activities have the capacity to change and preserve the environment in the interests of human health. It encourages multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working to address issues around the environment and health. It shows the value of this approach by supporting demonstration projects or conducting or commissioning analyses of problem issues which require collaboration between different agencies. HEN offers an independent, multi-disciplinary response to events, policy initiatives and directives that might influence the physical environment and thus health.

Organisation
HEN has been set up under the auspices of NHS Health Scotland, which provides administrative and facilitative support to the Network and its subgroups. Such support is accountable via the management structures of NHS Scotland. The Network and its subgroups recognise their responsibility to the public health community in Scotland.

Remit
HEN promotes understanding of environmental influences on health, and how these can be addressed. It aims to foster mutual understanding and shared purpose between organisations and professions through a series of seminars and workshops, using the insights gained to tackle problems directly. It identifies, selects and prioritises areas which impact on health, and works on them by forming short life working groups with specific outcomes and endpoints.

Functions
Hen acts as a forum for the exchange of information between member organisations and professions.

Membership and reach
The Network is inclusive, recognising the wide range of professions and organisations that have the capacity to influence the environment in this way. It draws on expertise within and beyond the Network to nurture the development of specialist subgroups, which will address challenges within specific aspects of the physical environment.

Further information on the Healthy Environment Network can be found at www.healthscotland.com/resources/networks/healthy-environment.aspx.

Dates for your diary
REHIS Annual Awards Ceremony - 19 November 2008 (evening)
REHIS Annual Free to Members CPD event - 20 November 2008 (morning)
REHIS Annual General Meeting - 20 November 2008 (afternoon)
Health and Safety Update 2008 - arrangements underway
Food Update 2008 - arrangements underway

If you wish to feature any Environmental Health or Public Health initiative, event or activity in the REHIS Newsletter, please contact Tom Bell, Chief Executive, on 0131 225 6999 or tb@rehis.com