Message from the Editor

Welcome to the September issue of the REHIS Newsletter. Ensuring the steady flow of interesting material for any publication is a major pre-occupation for editors of all publications. If any reader, be they a member of REHIS or not, wishes to submit an item that would be of interest to any professional involved in public health I would be delighted to hear from them. Please send any item for my attention to contact@rehis.com. I have recently invited John Sleith, Evonne Tennant, Lynsey McNair, Val Cameron and Jennifer Watkins to act as reporters for the newsletter and to advise me of any public health initiative or matter of interest that may be of interest to all readers and Jennifer has kindly submitted an item entitled ‘Repairing Standard for Private Rented Housing’. Jennifer’s article follows this message. Once again, if you wish to submit an item of interest to the public health community in Scotland please feel free to do so.

Tom Bell
Editor

Repairing Standard for Private Rented Housing by Jennifer Watkins

The Repairing Standard and Private Rented Housing Panel came into force on 3 September 2007, as part of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006. The new Repairing Standard will apply to almost all private sector tenancies and will extend previous obligations on private landlords to repair and maintain their property. Under the standard, a private landlord will have to ensure that:

- the property is wind and water tight and reasonably fit for human habitation
- the structure and exterior of the property are in reasonable repair and proper working order
- the installations in the property for the supply of water, gas and electricity and for sanitation, space heating and heating water are in reasonable repair and proper working order
- any fixtures, fittings and appliances provided under the tenancy are in reasonable repair and proper working order
- any furnishings provided under the tenancy are capable of being used safely for the purpose for which they are designed
- there is satisfactory provision of smoke alarms.

The Private Rented Housing Panel (PRHP) will make it easier for tenants to enforce a landlord’s obligations related to the Repairing Standard. If a tenant is having trouble resolving a matter with their landlord, they can apply for their case to be considered by the PRHP. If the Committee determines that the landlord has failed to comply with the Repairing Standard it can make an enforcement order requiring the landlord to undertake the work. It is an offence not to comply with an enforcement order. If the landlord continues not to do the work, then the Committee can impose a rent relief order to reduce the rent payable on the property until the committee is satisfied that the work has been completed.

Further information can be obtained from www.scotland.gov.uk or http://www.prhpscotland.gov.uk/prhp/1.html.
Cigarette Sales Age Check

The legal age for buying cigarettes and other tobacco products was raised from 16 years to 18 years on 1 October. In a Scottish Government News Release Shona Robison, the Minister for Public Health, stated that the new law was ‘a milestone in improving the health of young people’ and that it ‘sends out a clear message that tobacco is a highly dangerous substance’. The Minister is hopeful that the new law will discourage young people from taking up smoking in the first place.

REHIS goes to Holyrood

The Institute presented a very successful exhibition at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh between 10 and 13 September. The exhibition, which was sponsored by Stewart Maxwell MSP, an Honorary Vice President of REHIS, gave numerous MSPs and their researchers an opportunity to discuss a range of current issues with Bernard Forteath, Robert Howe, John Sleith, Graham Walker and myself, and to find out more about the Environmental Health Profession and Service, and about the work of the Institute in the improvement and promotion of public health in Scotland. In addition to the normal information booklets and leaflets, a number of specially prepared briefing notes on current environmental health issues were handed out to all who visited the exhibition.

Food Standards Agency Scotland

More than 9,000 Scottish children from 125 secondary schools will benefit from FSAS funding that will enable them to receive accredited food hygiene training. FSAS has committed £270,000 over a three year period and children at participating schools will undertake the REHIS Elementary Food Hygiene Course which will provide them with an industry recognised qualification.

New HSC Chairman

Judith Hackitt CBE, has been appointed Chairman of the Health and Safety Commission (HSC). Ms Hackitt, a Chemical Engineer, took up her appointment on 1 October. The stated aim of the HSC is ‘to protect everyone in Great Britain against risks to health or safety arising out of work activities; to conduct and sponsor research; promote training; provide an information and advisory service; and submit proposals for new or revised regulations and approved codes of practice.

2008 Malawi Calendar

The University of Strathclyde’s Malawi Millennium Committee will, for the first time, produce a calendar featuring a range of photographic images that have been captured by staff and students during visits to Malawi over the years. The editorial team of Shona Cameron (Department of Learning Services), Kingsley Lungu (Department of Environmental Health at the University of Malawi’s Polytechnic in Blantyre, Malawi) and Dr Tony Grimason (Head of Environmental Health) report that the calendar, which will make an excellent Christmas present, is now available for purchase. As the calendar print run is limited to 1,000 the prompt placing of any order is recommended. Orders can be placed by telephoning the University of Strathclyde’s Department of Learning Services on 0141 548 4146. Further details are available from Prism, the University’s magazine, at www.strath.ac.uk/prism - click on ‘Download September 2007 issue’.
Food Standards Agency Launches ‘The eatwell plate’

The FSA has launched its ‘eatwell plate’ to help consumers ensure a balanced diet. The ‘eatwell plate’ which can be accessed on the FSA website (http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/eatwellplate/) makes healthy eating easier to understand by showing the types and proportions of foods we need to have a healthy well balanced diet.

Dates for your diary

Scottish Government Seminar on Contaminated Land, Edinburgh, 5 November 2007

REHIS Health and Safety Update Course, 13 November 2007, Edinburgh

REHIS Annual Presentation of Awards, Edinburgh, 21 November 2007

REHIS ‘Environmental Health Update’ event, Edinburgh, 22 November 2007

REHIS Annual General Meeting, Edinburgh, 22 November 2007

UKPHA Annual Forum, Liverpool, 1 and 2 April 2008 (www.ukphaconference.org.uk)

REHIS Annual Conference, 17 and 18 April 2008 – venue to be advised

AIEH/IFEH 10th World Congress on Environmental Health, Brisbane, 11 to 16 May 2008

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