Working Group on the Future Role of the Environmental Health Profession in Scotland

The first of a series of meetings of the short life working group was held in Edinburgh on 4 February and a number of interested organisations including REHIS, the Scottish Government, the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland, the Food Standards Agency Scotland, Health Protection Scotland, the University of Strathclyde, local authorities and CoSLA were invited to present their views. The meeting was very positive and a follow-up meeting will be held in the near future. At the end of the process a report on the findings of the working group will be presented to Shona Robison, the Minister for Public Health, who kindly agreed to facilitate the working group.

Accessing Healthy Food in Scotland

Earlier this month the Food Standards Agency Scotland published a new study which looks at the availability of affordable healthy food across Scotland. Entitled Accessing healthy food: A national assessment and sentinel mapping study of food retailing in Scotland, the report was commissioned by the Agency and undertaken between 2005 - 2007 by the Centre for the Study of Retailing in Scotland at The University of Edinburgh.

A map of food shops and supermarkets was constructed and nine sample areas across Scotland were selected on the basis of urban-rural location and affluent-deprived conditions. A Healthy Eating Indicator Shopping Basket was designed to investigate the availability and cost of healthy foods in these nine areas. The ‘basket’ was made up of 35 items drawn from the five major food groups and included fresh fruit and vegetables, potatoes, baked beans, porridge oats, wholemeal breads, rice, oven chips, meat and fish and some low fat fresh dairy produce.

The results show a very complex picture, but in general the provision of food shops selling a range of healthy food was not found to be a major issue. A wide range of prices was identified for the ‘shopping basket’. The size of the food shop was more important than geographical location in influencing the availability and price of the healthy foods from the ‘basket’.

The study underlines the importance of finding ways to assist small general food shops to provide affordable, healthy foods and will help inform policy development in Scotland. FSAS is currently working in partnership with the Scottish Government Neighbourhood Shops project to develop strategies to help small food shops to provide a good range of healthy foods.

Full details of the report are available from the FSA website www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/feb/access.

Minister urges Scots to go Greener

On a recent visit to an Edinburgh nursery school, Minister for Environment Michael Russell encouraged all Scots to consider the impact their activities have on the environment and to do their bit for the planet’s future by pledging to go green in 2008. Scots are encouraged to sign up to one or more of the Scottish Government’s 10 Greener Pledges. They are:

- Recycle household waste using locally-provided facilities
- Turn the tap off when brushing your teeth
- Switch to using energy-saving light bulbs
- Leave the car at home at least once a week and cycle, walk, share a car or use public transport more often
- Use rechargeable batteries instead of disposable ones
- Reuse carrier bags when you shop
• Buy more seasonal and unpackaged food
• Hang your washing up to dry rather than using a tumbler dryer
• Organise or volunteer in an environmental project in your local community
• Pay back the environmental impact of any flights you take and choose not to fly when there’s a suitable alternative.

Full information on how to make your pledge can be found at www.infoscotland.com/ourfuture/CCC_FirstPage.jsp.

Communication with REHIS Approved Training Centres

A series of roadshows for REHIS Trainers presented during January 2008 in Dundee, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Falkirk were hailed a great success by all who were involved. Over 130 trainers from across Scotland attended the roadshows.

Graham Walker, Director of Training, supported by Ian McGruther and Dr Jane Bunting, Training Advisers for Food Hygiene/Health and Safety and Food and Health respectively, each presented short and informative presentations that covered facts and figures about the activities of Approved Training Centres, influences on course syllabuses and resources, the role of Sector Skills Councils, e-learning packages, work in progress with regard to specific courses and the development of a new Elementary Control of Infection Course. The opportunity was also taken to update trainers on the content of the REHIS website and to advise them of the limited offer of free membership and the benefits of membership of the Institute.

The Institute is very grateful to all who attended and to the following organisations and the individuals involved who hosted the roadshows, Dundee College, Cameron Food Safety Centre, Glasgow Metropolitan College and Forth Valley College.

REHIS Annual Conference 2008

This year’s Annual Conference will be held in the Menzies Belford Hotel, Edinburgh on 17 and 18 April. The conference theme will be ‘Environmental Health and Sustainable Communities’ and Robert Howe, President, has put together an excellent programme. Full details of the programme will be available on the REHIS website in the next few days. The conference will be of interest to all environmental health and public health professionals and to all with an interest in sustainability.

Public Health Professional Spotlight: Ruth Robertson

Ruth first heard about the work of Environmental Health Officers while completing her honours degree course in Microbiology at the University of Dundee and, after graduating from Dundee in 1984, she decided to pursue a career in Environmental Health and subsequently undertook the BSc (Hons) Environmental Health degree course at the University of Strathclyde. Ruth qualified as an Environmental Health Officer in 1986 having completed her professional training with Dundee City Council and continued to work with the local authority as a district Environmental Health Officer. With a particular interest in occupational health and safety, Ruth took part in the Health and Safety Executive’s Lead Authority Project with Dundee City Council partnering, first, Wm Low supermarkets and, thereafter, Tesco stores.

However, Ruth already had a particular interest in the role of environmental health in the wider public health agenda and subsequently she undertook a part-time Master of Public Health degree course at the University of Dundee. Her dissertation entitled ‘Electromagnetic Fields and Human Health’ involved both epidemiological and environmental monitoring research.

Ruth’s interest in public health research was further developed when she was seconded to the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at the University of Dundee. Here she worked with Dr Fiona Williams to investigate the possible environmental and human health effects of exposures to point pollution sources such as incinerators.
Ruth, an Honorary Lecturer at the University of Dundee, particularly enjoys teaching and lectures on the Master of Public Health/MSc Environmental Health course at Dundee University and at Glasgow University.

In 2000, Ruth left Dundee City Council and accepted the post of Environmental Health Adviser at the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (now Health Protection Scotland). During her time at Health Protection Scotland she has been involved in a number of initiatives including the development of the Environmental Health Surveillance System for Scotland (EHS3), research into the impact of the physical environment on health, and the development by the Scottish Government of an environment and health strategy for Scotland.

Ruth also has a keen interest in workforce development. In 2003 she co-authored, with George Morris, the ‘Environmental Health in Scotland and the Health Improvement Challenge’ report. This report was commissioned by REHIS and discusses how the environmental health profession can fully engage with the Scottish Government’s health improvement agenda. Ruth was subsequently invited to be the Executive Secretary for the Project Steering Group chaired by Dr David Old. This group, sponsored by REHIS, was responsible for examining and making recommendations to REHIS as to how the Morris/Robertson Report could be progressed.

In 2004, Health Protection Scotland was established and one of its responsibilities was the promotion of a competent and confident workforce in health protection in Scotland. As a result of this Ruth was asked to be Lead Officer for the development of a national framework for workforce education development for health protection in Scotland. The joint Health Protection Scotland/NHS Education for Scotland ‘Framework for workforce education development for health protection in Scotland’ was launched in 2006 after extensive consultation with stakeholders including environmental health colleagues.

In 2006, Ruth was seconded to NHS Education for Scotland to be the lead on behalf of HPS and NES for the implementation of the framework. This work currently includes the development and implementation of health protection educational resources in priority areas, eg, Legionella, pandemic flu and immunisation; carrying out regional workshops with Health Boards/local authorities to help facilitate action planning for the implementation of the framework; and participating in national consultations in relation to workforce education development in health protection, eg, the UK Voluntary Register for Public Health Specialists and National Occupational Standards for Health Protection.

Ruth is a Chartered EHO and a member of the Southern Centre’s Management Committee of REHIS.

Ruth is married with two children and in her spare time runs a Girl Guide Senior Section and enjoys a round of golf!

**REHIS Food and Health Course Seminar for Trainers**

The Food and Health Working Group has organised the date and venue for a one day seminar for REHIS Elementary Food and Health Course trainers. The seminar will take place at Dundee College, Kingsway Campus, Dundee DD3 8LE on 12 March 2008. A wide range of food and health issues will be covered and presentations will be given by speakers from the Scottish Government, the food industry, the Food Standards Agency Scotland, the World Cancer Research Fund, Community Food and Health Scotland, the healthyliving award and NHS Tayside. While aimed primarily at existing REHIS Food and Health Course trainers anyone working as a trainer who might be interested in becoming a registered food and health trainer will be welcome to attend the seminar.

For further details contact the REHIS Training Section on 0131 225 5444, gw@rehis.com or training@rehis.com
**Dates for your diary**

REHIS Law Enforcement Course, 22 to 24 February 2008, Tulliallan

REHIS Seminar for Food and Health Course Trainers, 12 March 2008, Dundee (see earlier item for details)

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


REHIS Annual Conference, 17 and 18 April 2008, Menzies Belford Hotel, Edinburgh

REHIS Public Health and Housing Update Course, 13 and 14 May 2008, Menzies Belford Hotel, Edinburgh

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

---

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