



## House of Lords Briefing 18 June 2009

# Environmental health co-ordination, planning and preparation for the Olympics/Paralympics 2012.

### Environmental health -the UK challenge

Around 10 million people, 2.5 million expected from outside the UK, will be visiting London for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. The mass gathering of visitors will test the UK environmental health and public health infrastructure as it attempts to deal with the main threats to public health including infectious disease, food safety, vector control and terrorism. With the focus of planning concentrating on the Olympic Park and Games venues there has been scant consideration of the public and environmental health impact across the country. This report calls for high level leadership and co-ordination to ensure the development of effective public health and environmental health strategies for a safe, sustainable and healthy Games in 2012.

### Summary

- Public and environmental health is vital to the athlete, public and visitor safety and wellbeing -not just within the venues but across the country
- Environmental health contributes significantly to reducing adverse visitor experience and the UK reputation as a world class tourist destination such as accommodation pest infestations, food quality, infectious disease and food poisoning
- There is a need for high level leadership and co-ordination to ensure effective public and environmental health strategies similar to that provided in previous Games.
- There is currently no single government focus for environmental health
- The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) is committed to securing the highest standards of public and environmental health.

### Background

The environmental health role is primarily to protect public health (athletes, visitors and public) and this includes food safety in food supply, preparation and service; healthy eating; drinking water quality; air quality; infectious disease management; public health and wellbeing; waste water; solid and hazardous waste; environmental control; pest management; housing/accommodation; health and safety, sustainability and emergency planning including terrorism.

As the largest international mass gathering in the world the Olympics/Paralympics pose many challenges for public and environmental health. Preventing exposure to environmental and public health hazards is essential to protecting the safety and wellbeing of athletes, public and visitors during the Games. In addition to the direct risks to public health many environmental health factors impact on the visitor experience of the event such as the presence of biting insects, pest infestations in hospitality accommodation. This will ultimately impact on the reputation of the UK as a world class tourist destination. These challenges are not just for consideration within the Games venues themselves but across London and other key tourist areas throughout the UK. The Olympic/Paralympic Games has a national footprint.

## Environmental health co-ordination

As seen in previous Olympic/Paralympics administration, environmental health has been at the heart of public health planning and strategy development for the Games (Atlanta 1996, New South Wales – Olympic Environmental Health Steering Group and Operational Plan 2000, Athens-environmental health surveillance and food safety management system 2004). However, in the UK there is no single government focus for co-ordination of environmental health related issues.

The CIEH is keen to ensure that it works within a clear remit that is supported through approved governance mechanisms. The CIEH works to fulfil a co-ordinating function offering the benefits of a holistic approach to the wider public health and building the foundations for a co-ordinated and consistent environmental health framework. We have been able to raise the profile of the environmental health contribution to planning for the Games which has been recently recognised by LOCOG in relation to our advisory capacity on food safety within the Olympic Park. We have also undertaken scoping and capacity building and preparedness within the profession and developed professional guidance on outdoor and mobile catering, pest minimisation in the construction and hospitality industry. We continue to help set consistent standards across key environmental health issues. The CIEH has been working with a wide range of partners and have networks that tie in host authorities and authorities that are keen to support events throughout the UK.

With less than 1130 days to go there is still more to be achieved and there are still many challenges that lie ahead including:

- Ensuring a safe and healthy food service across London and key tourist areas
- Ensuring the safety and quality of drinking water and water environments including *Legionella*, *Leptospirosis*, *Cryptosporidium*
- Management of communicable disease and other public health implications of mass gatherings including food poisoning
- Air quality management
- Other public health initiatives such as healthy eating options, alcohol use, smoking
- National pest minimisation strategy- research/control needed to reduce risks of mosquitoes and other biting insects in proximity to the venues
- Pest minimisation and safety within hospitality accommodation
- Environmental health emergency and resilience management

## Environmental health leadership

Future co-ordination of environmental health is vital to improving the public health preparedness of the Games in 2012. The CIEH view government leadership and a high level co-ordination of the public and environmental health national infrastructure as a key part of planning for 2012. The CIEH remains committed to securing the highest levels of public and environmental health and to ensuring a prepared and competent workforce and as such is ready to support such a co-ordinated national approach.

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