

DEFRA UPDATE ON SGVs

1. Neil Thornton's letter of 10 February (reference CLAN 3/06) to Jane Forshaw, Chair of the SGV Task Force, indicated that work was in hand within Defra to build on the work of the Task Force. This work was envisaged in the previous CLAN on this subject (CLAN 2/05), concerning the need for and content of further guidance on human health risk assessment to support decisions under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 ("contaminated land").
2. The Chair of the SGVTF had concluded that a number of practical and policy issues for Government had been identified by the Task Force work, including the development team's presentations and papers and the scientific debate.

Since January, Defra have been working with Jane Forshaw and Judith Lowe, the Environment Agency, the Health Protection Agency and ODPM. From this, a package of ideas, on which decisions can be made, is being drawn together, which aims to provide a way forward on SGVs, as envisaged in the earlier CLAN notes. This package is intended to fit within and support the existing legal framework. There are over 30 specific ideas under consideration. The approach is one of evidence-based policy making, and the valuable Task Force work forms part of the evidence. A technical workshop was held recently at which some issues were explored. Defra have now asked CL:AIRE (through Jane Forshaw) and Judith Lowe, on a consultancy basis, to assist in taking forward this work.

3. In this highly technical area, it is recognised by Defra that as much as possible of the foundation for decision-making has to be established centrally in guidance, rather individual decision-makers having to handle case-by-case, which leads to both inefficiency and inconsistency. That is a key policy objective.
4. Our aim is to:
 - refine a suitable package of policy and practical options
 - pursue such a package more widely within Government, including the devolved administrations and internally
 - help explain and explore support for proposals with key stakeholders and contributors, and
 - carry forward the envisaged improvements in a timely manner.
5. In the interim, Defra and the Environment Agency do not intend to publish further Soil Guideline Value or Toxicological reports, while this work continues. This is because the work is likely to lead to some changes, and it now makes sense to take account of this before publication of further guidance in the series, rather than doing so afterwards. The existing publications in the series, and other technical guidance, continue to be applicable and Defra continues to support their use in site-specific decision-making in accordance with the advice in CLAN 2/05. (see <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/land/contaminated/index.htm>)
6. While it is not possible to offer a timetable for expected outputs at present, one should be available as soon as work and agreement is further advanced. Further updates will be provided as soon as possible, and the need for progress is fully recognised.