

CIEH Northern Ireland

November 2009



Steve Cooper
Secretary and Chair
Northern Ireland Region

Regional Management Board 2010

Each year the Northern Ireland region elects its Management Board and this year is no different. CIEH NIR has 650 members and it is with elation that the board will be welcoming new members to sit on the board. There are four board meetings each year, along with board committees, and these groups set the education event programme each year and advise on strategy and the policy direction for the region. Our membership is diverse, has a wide demographic of young and emerging professionals which is complemented by the backbone of experienced EHPS who either work for or have retired from the service and beyond.

We do not hear enough from the membership. What is it you want to see happen with regards to training, meetings, advocacy, social events, and expanding international links? On the CIEH NI website there is information on how to contact the Management Board and voice your concerns to the Board, please make use of this and let's start talking.

Shortly the CIEH NIR will be seeking nominations for 2010 can I ask everyone to think about this and consider becoming a Board Member in order that we can continue to fashion an energetic, unified profession, well placed in all areas of the service and beyond.

Finally thanks to all existing and past board and central council members for all their hard work.

And now for something else

Many of you will know Richard Hanna, but not so many will know that he is retiring at the end of October. Richard has been a dedicated CIEH member and he rarely missed a meeting.

Thank you for your support Richard and best wishes to for a long and happy retirement. We hope that Richard will keep in contact and continue coming to the meetings, his support and vast experience will be most welcomed.

Richard Hanna works for Armagh District Council

www.armagh.gov.uk

Richard we will miss you.

Nigel McMahon, Chief Environmental Health Officer in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has been appointed as a Visiting Professor to the Built Environment at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. The role will mainly involve strategic input into the development of the Environmental Health courses, collaboration on research activities and delivering guest lectures. Nigel comments... I have had a long association with University of Ulster and I am delighted and honoured to be asked to contribute to the development of the undergraduate and post graduate environmental health programmes in this way.

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/

Congratulations..... Nigel

Your 6 Pack

Following in the footsteps of two of our pioneering sister CIEH regions the CIEH NIR management board is working towards the provision of low cost training opportunities starting April 2010.

The idea is that the region will organise a suite of six events based on practical training. We will offer this to employers and each participating employer will have at least two guaranteed places at each event

The events will cover all core areas and will be working with the CEHOG groups regarding content, topics, location and speakers etc. We will be concentrating on using home grown talent, knowledge and expertise.

Watch this space for more details.

In confidence

Need to speak with someone in confidence?

Contact Steve Cooper on

+447721664004

UKPHR

To view the recent report on registration of public health practitioners go to...

www.cieh-nireland.org

Over 600 reasons to be cheerful

Well because that's the number of people trained in food allergy on this island over the last four years, the majority during the Food Allergy Training Programme sponsored by **safefood**, the all island Food Safety Promotion Board. My formal involvement with food allergy began a few years ago when I was seconded to the Food Standards Agency, London to draw up training materials for food safety enforcement officers. Food allergy was a bit of a side line for me, giving a talk here, answering an allergy query there, writing protocols for allergen sampling surveys, but nothing major was happening on the allergen training front until the FSA offer. Then, after the FSA project ended, I was fortunate to be seconded as project manager of the CAWT/**safefood** Food Allergy Training Project, whose aim was to train EHOs involved in food safety in the border regions. This information would then be cascaded to the food trade during routine inspections. (CAWT stands for Cooperation And Working Together and is an administrative unit, set up to encourage people from both sides of the border to work together to improve health and social well being. It was the dissemination body for European Union funding under the Interreg 111A programme 2003-8). As many EHOs now know, the diagnosis of food allergy has important consequences for patients and their families and the reality for the allergic individual is a strict dietary regime of avoidance of foods known, or thought, to contain the allergen in question. What they may not know is that recent research has identified 'fear of death' as a major problem for many food allergy sufferers. Peanut allergic children reported more fear of an adverse event and more anxiety about eating, especially when eating away from home where the normal dietary controls are substantially eroded and not just for the sufferer but for their family and friends as well. The provision of safe food to those with food allergies is of paramount importance. However the regulatory mechanisms in place in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland were geared towards the control of traditional hazards characterised as physical, chemical and microbiological, through the implementation of hazard analysis-based food safety management systems. Extending the hazard analysis principle to allergens should control the consumption of foods known to be dangerous to the allergic consumer but previous research carried out in 1999 with enforcement officers in Northern Ireland highlighted the lack of knowledge and the need for appropriate training in food allergen control. This was further substantiated in Northern Ireland in 2002 when 21% of the 'safe' meals sampled as part of an investigation into the feasibility of purchasing an allergen-free meal on request, were in fact unsafe. Essentially all participating food safety enforcement officers indicated a need for training in this area. More recently in 2005, a **safefood**-sponsored all-island study carried out by EHOs, showed that allergic consumers still face difficulties in purchasing foods in a catering setting. The research, which was carried out in a number of food businesses including sandwich bars, cafes, supermarkets and forecourt shops, showed there was still a risk of inaccurate advice on the allergen status of food being given to the allergic customer. Again, participating EHOs from both jurisdictions were overwhelmingly supportive of further training.

In July 2006, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee appointed a sub-committee to explore the impact of allergy on patients, society and the economy as a whole. The committee reported in September 2007 that "Allergy in the UK has now reached epidemic proportions" and that new food allergy are regularly being described. During its deliberations, the sub-committee considered, amongst other allergies, food allergy and made the key recommendation that "it is imperative that, environmental health officers, trading standards officers and catering workers are adequately and comprehensively trained in practical allergen management." This was good news for those of us working in the allergy field: for once we were ahead of the game as the CAWT/**safefood** project had been delivering training in practical allergen management to Local Authority/HSE Environmental Health Officers involved in food safety enforcement duties in the Border region. The project consisted of a conference, a series of workshops for EHOs and the provision of online and printed materials. EHOs were provided with materials and knowledge to equip them to educate and inform all the catering businesses which they inspect about allergy and its implications in food supply, preparation and service. While the project was certainly successful in achieving its aims, it also highlighted an obvious imbalance as the remaining EHOs on the island of Ireland remained untrained. To address this discrepancy, it was accepted by **safefood** that the project should be rolled out to the remaining EHOs working in food control on the island of Ireland adhering to the same format which would involve a conference and training workshops and the associated resource materials. However, based on the experience gained during the CAWT/**safefood** project, it was decided to include third level catering lecturers who could cascade the training received to their catering students and Public Analysts Laboratory staff who interface with EHOs during allergy related investigations. The **safefood** project has now been completed and it is fair to say the training has been very well received all round. Hopefully, those who have received the training now have the confidence and skills necessary to discuss allergen controls in food safety management systems with the trade or with their students as a routine matter. I duly acknowledge the enormous contribution of **safefood** for having the foresight to fund this programme, to Hygiene Audit Systems, the training contractor for a job well done, to CAWT for part funding phase one, to FSA, London for giving me exposure to the food allergy community in the first place and last but not least, to Omagh District Council for kindly releasing me on secondment. Thank

Dr Ian Leitch
Project Manager Food Allergy
safefood

www.safefood.eu
www.omagh.gov.uk

Climate Change & Pest Control

It was with great interest that I read the recent submission by the CIEH to the environment committee regarding climate change that highlighted a number of climate change factors including the expected environmental health impacts. I was particularly pleased at the acknowledgement of the expected additional pressures that changes to our climate are likely to cause to our pest management services. The report highlighted that it is expected temperatures in Belfast could exceed 32°C by 2080, this is in line with other research which has stated that by 2080 the average UK temperature will have risen by 2.5 – 3.5°C, with drier and warmer summer conditions, as well as wetter and colder winter conditions.

Pests are known to be primary vectors in the spread of disease, with their ability to harbour, carry and transmit infection allowing this. Pests additionally have the capability to destroy food crops. The way in which our pest population will be affected by climate change is relatively unknown. However, we do know that the rate at which most common pests develop and survive is dependent on climatic conditions (temperature, humidity and water availability). For example the common house fly currently takes around 32 days to develop from egg to adult, however if temperatures rose to the predicted levels this period could be decreased to 8 days resulting in an exponential population increase. On the other hand, the temporary exposure of some populations, like the carrot fly, to extremely high temperatures may delay the development of surviving individuals and delay the subsequent generation.

Furthermore to the changes in the reproduction and survival of our pest population, along with the introduction of milder winters and warmer summers, it is inevitable that pests usually associated with tropical climates may become established on our shores, as their migration transfer could be completed with ease as we import more and more products from 3rd world countries. This migration and their survivability may introduce previously unseen disease into the UK. Without a doubt it is evident that changes in our climate will affect the success of our current pest control methods. In addition to climate change conditions, the ever-increasing pressure to reduce pesticide use, and the changes to breeding patterns may result in the rapid development of pesticide resistance in some species, thus making current

treatment methods redundant. In addition to the risks of climate change, it has been recently documented that our rodent population in Northern Ireland has increased 10% in the last year, and this is will continue to rise. The reasons for this are generally unknown, it has been suggested that this may be due to better reporting of rodent activity, others however claim it is the decreased levels of treatment by councils and statutory agencies coupled with the current economic climate leaving many households unable to afford, the sometimes costly, treatments provided by the private sector. In conclusion there is considerable uncertainty associated with climate change predictions and this uncertainty is mirrored in the changing pressures on pest management in the future. What is clear is that changes in weather patterns will affect the UK pest profile with some species becoming a more serious problem, whilst others may decline. Pest numbers will continue to fluctuate from season to season depending on the environmental factors presented, however it is clear that we cannot become complacent and must acknowledge and act on the fact that pests continue to pose an ever increasing risk to our population through the spread of disease and the disruption to our food supplies.

Gary Moore

NIPAG

www.lisburncity.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Pest Advisory Group (NIPAG) annual event

The importance of Pest Management in the Food Industry

2 December 2009

Lisburn Island Civic Centre

Join NIPAG for their third annual event which provides an opportunity for delegates within the food and pest management industries to hear presentations from leading experts on the importance of pest management in public health with particular reference to the food industry.

To book your place telephone 02892509250

CIEH NIR course

Practical Pest Control

02.11.09 & repeated again on 03.11.09

If you have a booking form for this event, can you forward it to d.drummond@cieh.org.

Each course holds a maximum of 15 delegates. Like to know more? Go to www.cieh-nirland.org

A note from afar

As a kid I was fortunate enough to spend a number of family vacations in Vancouver, British Columbia.. I was always amazed by the raw natural beauty of the country (snow capped mountains, crystal clear lakes etc.) and how friendly Canadians were and I vowed that one day I would move to Canada to live and work and drive my favourite muscle car (Pontiac Trans-Am). Time quickly passed by, and whilst completing my BSc (Hons) degree in Biological Sciences at the Queen's University of Belfast I was introduced to the world of the Environmental Health Officer by a good friend of mine (David Cuthbert, now working with Belfast City Council) who was completing the Environmental Health course at Jordanstown. I was intrigued by the diversity the job offered, and after doing some work shadowing at Craigavon Borough Council I decided it was the job for me. So after completing my Biology Degree I enrolled in the MSc Environmental Health course at the University of the West of England (UWE) Bristol. Upon completion of my MSc I was offered a job with Southend-on-Sea Borough Council in Essex (where I had completed my one year work placement). I started out my career in the Health and Safety section for a brief three months and was then transferred to the Private Sector Housing team. During this time I still had the burning desire to fulfill my childhood dream of moving to Canada, but I didn't really know where or how to start going about it. It was then that fate started to play a big role and an ex-chief EHO (Fred Ritson) from Castlepoint Council (Essex) came out of retirement to work part time in the Housing Team. Fred is quite the character and I always enjoyed listening to his stories of EH "back in the day". One day we got talking and I mentioned that I would be going on vacation to Vancouver that year. At this Fred said "Oh, my son Mark works in Canada". I asked what line of work he was in and couldn't believe my ears when Fred said that he was an EHO working with Vancouver Coastal Health Authority! Fred was good enough to put me in contact with Mark who was kind enough to arrange a few days work placement for me during my Family vacation. I only spent 3 days work shadowing with Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), but I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. On my last day I spoke with the Chief EHO (Domenic Losito) regarding my quest to work in Vancouver. At the time I had only about one year's working experience, so Domenic suggested that I get a few more years experience under my belt and contact him again then. Time passed swiftly by again and I completed a further 3 years working with the Private Sector Housing Team, and 2 years with the Food Safety Team at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. During this time I kept in contact with Mark Ritson, and one day received an email detailing that VCH had a few EHO vacancies that they were having difficulty filling due to a shortage of students taking the course. Mark suggested that if I really was serious about moving to Vancouver to work now would be the time. So in March 2006 I arranged to go for an interview for one of the jobs vacancies; it went well in my opinion, however I heard nothing back from VCH for approximately 3 months. Thinking the worst I decided that I would settle in Southend, after all I had always enjoyed living and working there. So I bought a house, got into a serious relationship...and then you can guess what happened

next...only two months after buying my house I received an email from VCH management offering me a permanent position, relocation expenses and an immigration consultant to assist me in obtaining a three year working visa. Surprisingly after years and years of wanting to move to Vancouver, when I actually received the formal job offer, I came up with one hundred and one reasons why I should not go! Fortunately sense prevailed and my then girlfriend, Jade, (now fiancé) was up for making the big move by my side. On May 17th 2007 we lifted off from Gatwick airport to start our Canadian adventure. Unfortunately I was not simply allowed to start working as a fully qualified EHO, I had to first get "certified" by the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (CIPHI). This involved completing 6 months work shadowing followed by completing the CIPHI Board Exams. This included submitting 2 detailed reports on 2 different areas of environmental health. I did one report on the routine food hygiene inspection of a restaurant and the other on a swimming pool inspection, and then had to sit a professional interview similar to that done by the CIEH. Another hurdle I had to contend with was the fact that after 3 months of permanently residing in British Columbia you are required to get a BC driving license! This involved a knowledge test (identifying road signs, symbols, why not to over take on a corner etc.) and a 1 hour driving test. In case you are wondering the first car I bought was in fact a Pontiac Trans-Am! And I obtained my BC driving license fairly easily. So how does working in Vancouver compare to the UK? Well, the day to day job is actually extremely similar, as is the legislation. We operate under the Public Health Act of British Columbia and the numerous Regulations made under this Act including the Food Premises Regulations, Personal Services Establishment Regulations, Swimming Pool, Spray Pool and Wading Pool Regulations but to name a few. One big benefit the legislation has over UK law is the fact that we can issue violation tickets to the owner of a premises as part of our progressive enforcement. For example, if an owner fails to have adequately trained staff he/she can be ticketed for \$230, or if adequate refrigeration and or hot holding equipment is not used he/she can be fined \$345 etc. Also a huge advantage in terms of reducing work load and time is that EHO's can issue a closure order themselves without the need to go to court to obtain one. As a result I find that EHOs get more respect here in Canada than back in the UK, and having these enforcement tools at our disposal makes achieving compliance easier than I found when working in the UK. Other advantages I have working in Canada include the Vancouver office operating a 4 day working week. This is unique to the Vancouver office but works remarkable well. Basically each officer will have a working partner who covers them on their day off and vice versa, so for example my work partners off day is Friday, so I cover any emergencies in her area that day. Monday is my off day, so she covers my district then! I am certainly living the dream

Ian Stewart
CIEH Member, Canada