

## Contaminated Land News - May 2000

Part IIA (note the capital 'A') has been in place for about 5 weeks – and the world has not stopped turning yet! The final version of the DETR circular is available from [www.detr.gov.uk/contaminated/land](http://www.detr.gov.uk/contaminated/land) and was described in last month's News. The past month has seen draft guidance for Local Authority Inspection Strategies and a major film – Erin Brockovich - being released as well as the broadcast of two television programmes dealing with contaminated land – BBC Panorama's 'Blighted' on 20 March and Channel 4's Dispatches on 6 April – but still no CLEA guideline values or Model Procedures.

DETR and the Environment Agency, with help from Judith Lowe, have prepared draft advice for Local Authorities on how to prepare their inspection strategies. Copies of this document have been posted on the FOCIL email list and may be retrieved from the web archive at [www.mailbase.ac.uk](http://www.mailbase.ac.uk). Comments by 1 June 2000 are welcomed by DETR. The advice note is structured into 3 parts – an introduction and overview of local authority duties, a procedure for developing the strategy and a proposed structure for a strategy. The proposed structure is presented in the form of a check list of items to include in the inspection strategy document. Items are tagged as essential, recommended or optional. One of the essential items is a description of the characteristics of the Local Authority area – current land use characteristics; protected locations; key property types, eg ancient monuments; key water resource/protection issues; known information on contamination; current and past industrial history; and geological/hydrogeological characteristics. Those Local Authorities fortunate enough to have been the subject of a British Geological Survey applied geology project will have a head start in writing this part of their inspection strategy. Feedback of an earlier draft of the advice note, elicited from 25 local authority representatives attending a seminar held at the University of Nottingham in March, was positive and the advice was warmly received. While allowing for local authorities to reflect their individual circumstances, the advice, if widely adopted, should result in a degree of consistency in inspection strategies across the country and thereby avoid one of the biggest threats of LAs outsourcing the preparation of the inspection strategy to a wide number of organisations.

Those of you who missed Panorama's 'Blighted' can find the full transcript at [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) in the Panorama archive section. The ensuing online discussion highlighted the strong emotional response that land contamination causes: anger from residents whose houses had been featured against their wishes, fear from those potentially affected by any contamination and frustration from those who felt the programme was a setback to attempts to reuse brownfield sites rather than consume more greenfield land. The speedy response of ICI to the discovery of hexabutadiene inside houses near their Weston Quarries, Runcorn was acknowledged by the program makers as being as much as could be expected in the circumstances. The Environment Agency, in response to questions about the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield, confirmed that they have no power within the planning system to require certain forms of remediation – and went on to say that 'perhaps we don't wish to have powers' to overturn LA planning decisions. The factory features in "*Unsafe as Houses: Urban Renaissance or Toxic Time Bomb*" by Paul de Zylva et al (available from Friends of the Earth at £12.95) who discuss building houses on contaminated land from a NGO perspective,

The Dispatches programme (<http://www.channel4.com/>) considered the effectiveness of the landfill tax since its introduction four years ago. In a post programme on-line poll 62% of voters said they would be prepared to pay extra purchase taxes on goods and services to fund proper waste disposal and 86% said that there should be there be stricter laws, backed up by fines, to force people to recycle their refuse.

Finally if you have not seen *Erin Brockovich* yet then a visit to your local flicks is a must. The film is based on a true story and follows the consequences of a release of chromium VI from a power station and the discovery of evidence of the release by the eponymous Erin – played in revealing style by Julia Roberts. Films such as this and *A Civil Action* are raising public awareness of land contamination issues and offer an ideal opportunity for us all to get across the message that brownfield sites can be redeveloped safely – but that such practices require specialist skills and expertise. A recent publication from the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research (SNIFFER) entitled “Communicating Understanding of Contaminated Land Risks” provides a compact overview of what constitutes good practice in risk communication.