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Welcome!

Welcome to the Environmental Health Bulletin, the quarterly newsletter which provides information on developments in the field of environmental health. The Bulletin is edited by Hunter New England Population Health and is distributed via email to people working in the field of environmental health within the area covered by Hunter New England Health.

Your contributions, news and feedback are welcome to help ensure the Bulletin is relevant and interesting. Our contact details are on page six.

We would appreciate it if new staff or staff without email, have access to this newsletter. It can also be downloaded from our website at: http://www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnep/h/environmental_health

Smoke-free Environment Policy Greater Taree City Council

Taree City Council's Smoke-free Environment Policy comes into force this month. The adoption of its Smoke-free Environment Policy follows a large number of NSW council areas that have already introduced similar policies.

In adopting the policy, Council took into consideration the comments received during the extensive period of public consultation.

The policy effectively bans the smoking of cigarettes (and other tobacco) in the following locations:

- Within ten (10) metres of all children's playground equipment
- Within ten (10) metres of all playing fields, sporting grounds and sporting facilities
- At all events run or sponsored by Council
- In all alfresco dining areas on public land
- Within ten (10) metres of all Council owned building entrances
- At all covered bus stops and taxi ranks

The policy has been introduced to:

- Improve the health of community members
- Improve public amenity and maintenance of Council property
- Raise community awareness of the issues associated with smoking
- Provide community leadership in taking measures to protect the health and social wellbeing of the community
- Minimise cigarette butt pollution on Council owned land.

In the first instance Council will be taking an educational approach to the introduction of the policy. Council Officers, including Environmental Health Officers and Rangers are authorised by Council to enforce the policy.

For further information contact Philip Martin, SEHO, at Greater Taree Council via email: Philip.Martin@gtcc.nsw.gov.au or visit: www.gtcc.nsw.gov.au



Water Industry Competition Act Review

Securing the water supply of NSW in the long-term and during drought requires innovation, resources and the cooperation of both the Government and the private sector. In 2006, the *Water Industry Competition Act* and *Regulations* were introduced to encourage competition in the water industry and to promote recycling projects and efficiency in the provision of water and wastewater services.

The *Water Industry Competition Act 2006* established a licensing regime for private sector entrants to ensure the continued protection of public health, consumers and the environment. However, current exemptions appear to have resulted in an inconsistent application of the provisions. This led the NSW Office of Water to review the *Water Industry Competition (General) Regulation 2008* to clarify its intention.

While it is difficult to consider all the different water and sewerage infrastructure activities, certain low risk non-competitive activities may be more appropriately regulated elsewhere, if at all.

In response, a draft *Water Industry Competition (General) Amendment (Licensing Exemptions) Regulation 2010* has been developed to help streamline the types of activities that require regulation under the Act. This addresses activities:

- on remote Aboriginal land
- on single and dual-occupancy residential properties
- that involve the private conveying of water and sewerage from a public water utility or licensees under the *Water Industry Competition Act 2006*
- associated with lower risk sewerage infrastructure
- relating to certain uses of roof water and groundwater.

Prior to the introduction of the *Water Industry Competition Act 2006*, approval for private water and sewerage infrastructure was granted predominantly under the *Local Government Act 1993*. Currently a proponent may require approval under both Acts. This duplication leads to process inefficiencies and creates unnecessary 'red tape', discouraging proponents from entering the water and sewerage service market.

To coincide with this review, the NSW Government aims to streamline the approval processes by removing the need for a second approval if a proponent is granted a licence under the *Water Industry Competition Act 2006*.

For further information go to:

<http://www.water.nsw.gov.au/Urban-Water/Review-and-reform>

Quality assurance compliance survey of water cooling systems

Legionnaires' disease is usually linked to poorly operated, maintained and unregistered water cooling systems. Within the next few months NSW Health, together with Area Health Services and Local Councils across NSW, will conduct quality assurance compliance surveys of water cooling systems (WCS).

The aim of the survey is to obtain an estimate of the level of compliance of WCS in NSW with the prescribed operational and maintenance requirements of the *Public Health (Microbial Control) Regulation 2000*.

WCS will be randomly selected from NSW local council registers. Over 300 WCS will be inspected in NSW with 35 WCS from Hunter New England. Overall, the number of selected systems will be statistically significant to allow for assessment of compliance with the Regulations, and allow comparison of the methodologies used for its enforcement.

Area Health Service Environmental Health Officers would like to conduct the inspections jointly with Councils.

The recommended survey scheduling is during September to December 2010. The *WCS Survey Inspection Form* consists of 28 questions to monitor compliance with fundamental operational and maintenance requirements of the Act and Regulation. The survey inspection form is less detailed than the standard audit tool and will take less time to complete but will still collect essential data. The completed forms will then be forwarded to the Environmental Health Branch of NSW Health for data analysis.

Hunter New England Environmental Health will be in contact with nominated Councils within the next few months to support of this State-wide initiative. It is hoped that all Councils will consider the benefits of the survey and take part in the joint inspections.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact Chris Williams on 49246481 or Nichole Ansell on 49246476



Easy and Safe Access to Water Cooling Systems

To enable an inspection of water cooling systems there must be safe and easy access. NSW Health has developed information which identifies the appropriate Australian Standards that can be used to determine safe and easy access to water cooling systems and how to obtain compliance.

1. Australian Standard AS1657-1992

Australian Standard AS1657-1992 "Fixed platforms, walkways, stairways and ladders – Design, construction and installation" sets out the requirements for the design, construction and installation of fixed platforms, walkways, stairways and ladders which are intended to provide access to places normally used by operating, inspection, maintenance and servicing personnel. It is recommended that all EHOs have access to and become familiar with AS1657-1992.

2. Public Health Act 1991

The *Public Health Act 1991* commenced 18/11/1991. Water cooling systems installed after that date must comply with Section 45:

S.45 Installation of system

1. The installation on regulated premises of a regulated system must be done in accordance with the prescribed installation requirements.
2. If a regulated system is installed in contravention of this section, the installer of the system is guilty of an offence.
3. If a regulated system is installed on regulated premises in contravention of this section, the occupier of the premises at the time of installation of the system is guilty of an offence unless the court is satisfied that the installation was carried out by a person or persons who might reasonably be expected to be competent to do so.

The prescribed installation requirements for water cooling systems are found in Clause 8 of the *Public Health (Microbial Control) Regulation 2000*.

S.8 Installation of water cooling systems

For the purposes of Section 45 of the Act, the following are prescribed installation requirements:

- a) the water cooling system must be installed in accordance with AS/NZS 3666.1:2002 *Air-handling and water systems of buildings-Microbial control-Design, installation and commissioning*, as applicable to the specific system, except to the extent that this Regulation provides otherwise,

- b) the occupier of the area where the system is installed must be given both an operation manual and a maintenance manual for the system, each of which must comply with the requirements for such manuals set out in AS/NZS 3666.2:1995 *Air-handling and water systems of buildings-Microbial control-Operation and maintenance*.



Clause 8(a) refers to AS/NZS 3666.1 as a prescribed installation requirement for water cooling systems. Section 4 of AS/NZS 3666.1 *Design, Installation and Commissioning of Cooling Water Systems*. Section 4.1.1 Access for maintenance is relevant and states:

Easy and safe access for cleaning, inspection and maintenance shall be available to and about all plant, equipment and components covered in this section. Relevant requirements of AS1470, **AS1657**, AS/NZS1892.1 and AS/NZS 2865 shall be complied with.

Therefore AS1657-1992 can be enforced.

3. Enforcement

Where there is not easy and safe access to a water cooling system the alternatives to obtain compliance are:

3.1. Where the water cooling system was installed before 18 November 1991.

Non-compliance with AS1657-1992 should be reported to the NSW WorkCover Authority through its hotline ph. 131050. WorkCover should take the corrective action.

3.2. Where the water cooling system was installed on or after 18 November 1991.

The matter may be either referred to WorkCover Authority for remedial action or a prosecution under Section 45 of the Act may be commenced. Section 50 of the Act should be considered to determine proceedings. (Note: there is no power to serve a direction for a breach of prescribed installation requirements.) The decision to refer or prosecute should be made in consultation with WorkCover as they may have higher penalties depending on the circumstances.

Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008

The *Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008* brought into effect from **1 July 2009** new requirements for tobacco retailers and the community, and incorporates provisions of the *Public Health Act 1991* relating to tobacco control.

This legislation aims to reduce the incidence of smoking and consumption of other tobacco products and non-tobacco smoking products, particularly by young people, in recognition of the fact that the consumption of those products adversely impacts on the health of the people of New South Wales and places a substantial burden on the State's health resources.

The new provisions in this legislation:

- Ban smoking in cars in which a person under 16 years is present
- Prohibit the display of tobacco products
- Limit outlets to one point of sale for tobacco products
- Introduce a notification scheme for tobacco
- Change the law about tobacco vending machines



Information has been prepared to assist retailers to make the necessary changes to their business operations in order to ensure compliance with the new Act. The following factsheets are available on the NSW Health website:

- Retailer Factsheet - Display
- Retailer Factsheet - Retailer Notification Scheme
- Retailer Factsheet - Single point of sale
- Retailer Factsheet - Signage
- Retailer Factsheet - Shopper Loyalty Programs
- Brochure - Selling tobacco in NSW, tips for retail employees
- Industry flyer - general tobacco retailing legislation changes
- Industry flyer - tobacco vending machine changes

Factsheets can be downloaded from:

[http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/healthpromotion/tobacco/information for tobacco retailers and consumers.asp](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/healthpromotion/tobacco/information%20for%20tobacco%20retailers%20and%20consumers.asp)

Respiratory and Cardiovascular Diseases and Cancer among Residents in the Hunter New England Area Health Service

Newly released, this report focuses on diseases and causes of death that have been found to be associated with exposure to air pollutants. Analysis has also been undertaken of some diseases about which the community of the Hunter New England Area Health Service (HNEAHS) has expressed concern.

Reliable and routinely collected health data is used to:

1. assess the health of the residents of the HNEAHS
2. compare the health of the residents of the HNEAHS to the health of residents in other parts of NSW
3. examine variations in health within HNEAHS in relation to the distribution of coal mining and coal-powered electrical power generation activity within this area.

The report can be downloaded from NSW Health at:

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2010/hne_respi_cardio.html

Skin Penetration Presentation

Due to a number of requests, a new and informative PowerPoint presentation '**Disease risk from unsafe skin penetration**' has been uploaded onto the NSW Health website. The presentation has been used at a number of Council organised workshops to educate skin penetration operators on the dangers and effects of carrying out unsafe skin penetration procedures. Please note that the presentation should be used in conjunction with a 'Disease Transmission' presentation as many operators have little understanding of 'germ theory'.

The presentation can be downloaded from:

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/PublicHealth/environment/general/body_grooming.asp



Eyebrow piercing



Mycobacteria infection

Other presentations which mainly relate to the regulations and guidelines are also available upon request.

For further information contact Anne Ford, Snr Policy Analyst, NSW Health by phoning (02) 9816 0225 or email: anne.ford@doh.health.nsw.gov.au

Public Health Risk Assessment National Park Drinking Water Supplies

Hunter New England Health (HNEH) is currently undertaking a public health risk assessment of drinking water supplies in popular National Parks.

This risk management approach has been adopted due to concerns that serious outbreaks of waterborne disease may occur as a result of people drinking contaminated water in a National Park. The risk of illness can be greatly reduced when visitors are adequately informed and cautioned on the water quality of a water supply system.

Whilst potable drinking water is not provided in most parks, an obligation remains to comply with the provisions of the *NSW Private Water Supply Guidelines* and the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, 2004* where water is supplied for other uses such as for sanitary purposes.

Unsatisfactory conditions may include:

- Lack of signage stating water is not for drinking
- Visibly dirty or cloudy water
- No obvious signs of regular maintenance

Should these conditions be likely to pose health risks to the public the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services (through DECCW) will be requested to rectify problems and abate health risks.



If you are aware of or have received complaints regarding possible unsafe drinking water in a National Park within your Local Government Area, it would be appreciated if you could contact Fidelis Jaravani by phoning 67648020 or email fidelis.jaravani@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au

NSW Health Skin Penetration Working Group

The newly formed NSW Department of Health Skin Penetration Working group met for the first time last month. The Skin Penetration Working Group aims to:

- Promote collaboration across the NSW Public Health Network on skin penetration issues
- Assist with the development of skin penetration resources and programs for the Department of Health
- Identify skin penetration needs, priorities and emerging issues
- Contribute to building the capacity of the NSW Public Health Network to deliver skin penetration policies and programs
- Promote high standards and consistency of practice across the NSW Public Health Network

Proposed work for the Group includes:

Planning Committee

- Establish planning committee to assist with organising events and workshops
- Two day skin penetration workshop – program to include guest speakers and working groups to review legislation, audit tools etc. (funding approved)
- Displays for Expos, conferences
- Infection Control and Sterilisation Workshop for EHOs (funding approved for two workshops)

Educational materials (literature review)

- Body art including scarification and implants
- Dermabrasion
- Skin needling
- Scarring moxibustion and religious scarification
- Colonic lavage
- Infections associated with skin penetration
- Implements that require sterilisation
- Consumer protection information
- Disinfectants
- Aftercare

Resources to assist the inspectorate/Industry

- Revise audit tools
- Development of Protocols e.g. Inspection of Skin Penetration Premises
- Guide for Inspecting Skin Penetration at Temporary Events
- Consider recognition scheme
- Industry guides
- Risk assessment of skin penetration practices (sterile versus non-sterile gloves, mobile operators)
- Posters - hand washing, sterilisation, etc
- DVD, infection control (funding approved)
- Industry/EHO news

If you have any suggestions, resources which may assist or for further information, contact Cindy Gliddon by phoning 49246468 or email cindy.gliddon@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au

Conferences & Training

EHA (Vic Inc) Emergency Management Training for Public Health Professionals
Mt Macedon Vic, 25-30 July 2010
Details: Bernadette Ferraro Ph. (03) 9438 5960

EHA (NSW Inc) Public Health School
Griffith NSW, 28-29 July 2010
Details: <http://www.eh.org.au/branches/nsw/index.php>

On-site Wastewater Management Training Course
Newcastle, NSW, 9-11 August 2010
Details: Zoe Slater, CET Ph. 4954 4997

Erosion and Sediment Control Workshops
Newcastle, NSW 16-17 & 30-31 August 2010
Details: Zoe Slater, CET Ph. 4954 4997

EHA (NSW Inc) Food Surveillance School
Sydney, 1-3 September
Details: nsw@eh.org.au

IFEH 11th World Congress on Environmental Health
Vancouver Canada, 5-10 September 2010
Details: <http://www.ifeh2010.org/>

Public Health Emergency Management (I) Training for Health Professionals
Sydney, 19-21 October 2010
Details: Christopher.Williams@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au

Hunter New England Environmental Health Staff

Dr. David Durrheim, Service Director - Health Protection

Newcastle: Philippe Porigneaux, EH Mgr / SEHO
Chris Williams, EHO
Louise Prosser, Tobacco Officer
Cindy Gliddon, EHO (Mon - Wed)
Carolyn Herlihy, EHO (Thurs - Fri)
Nichole Ansell, Trainee EHO

Taree: Hannah Ballard, Trainee EHO

Tamworth: Glenn Pearce, SEHO
Fidelis Jaravani, EHO
Ruth Williams, Trainee EHO

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009

From 1 July 2010 the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (or GIPA for short) comes into force and replaces the *Freedom of Information Act 1989*.

GIPA provides new rights to information and encourages the routine and proactive release of government information. There is a presumption in favour of disclosure unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure.

More information is available at the website of the new Office of the Information Commissioner www.oic.nsw.gov.au

Water testing for Private Water Supplies

The Division of Analytical Laboratories (DAL) is now performing water safety tests for private water supplies including microbiological, physical and inorganic chemical testing.

For a brochure outlining costs & services or for further information phone Cheryl Brown, DAL (02) 9646 0322

Light Reading ...

Health Stream Newsletter - Issue 58, June 2010 is available via the web site of Water Quality Research Australia at: <http://www.wqra.com.au>

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Eurosurveillance - Edition 2010 Volume 15, Issue 26 - Article 3 Cluster of Legionnaires' disease associated with use of a spa

In May 2010, a cluster of three cases of Legionnaires disease was identified in France. The results of the epidemiological, environmental and microbiological investigations identified a public whirlpool spa as the most probable source of contamination. Full article available at: <http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleId=19602>

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