



Brexit and Environmental Health

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Parliamentary Briefing

CIEH is a charity and professional membership body for Environmental Health Professionals across the country.

We have a heritage of more than 130 years and our purpose is to help our members and the wider profession achieve the objective of enabling safer, cleaner and healthier environments for the benefit of people, businesses and local communities.

Environmental Health in the UK

Key Points

- Environmental Health covers a wide-range of vital issues that affect people across the UK, such food, housing, health and safety in the workplace, environmental protection, and public health.
- Tackling issues such as food safety, poor quality housing, and dangerous air quality, Environmental Health Professionals are found in different settings across the public, private and third sectors, providing support and advice to businesses, local communities and consumers.
- Environmental Health Professional work often goes unnoticed but is of great importance. In improving and protecting health and wellbeing, the profession helps reduce inequalities and tackles causes of chronic illnesses. Ultimately this reduces the burden on and increases the capacity of the over-stretched NHS.

Brexit and Food Standards

When it comes to the food we eat, the homes we live in and the places where we work and socialise, standards in the UK are better than ever before.

However, the UK's departure from the European Union poses notable questions about these standards going forward.

Over the past 30 years, UK food, health and safety, and environmental protection, regulation has been driven by the EU. Following Brexit, the UK will still need a strong regulatory framework to protect our economy, our exports and the health and well-being of consumers, workers and communities.

There are over 50 separate EU Directives and Regulations alone that govern Food standards in the UK, whilst more than 40% of all legislation coming out of EU is food related.

CIEH's own research has indicated that Brexit, unless carefully and comprehensively managed involving people who know and understand food systems and procedures, has the potential to create serious implications for the invaluable work that Environmental Health Professionals do in the UK.

Brexit and Food Imports

Food imports to the UK could be brought to a standstill as a result of the need for new food safety checks, if the Government is unable to conclude a trade deal with the European Union.

Currently, food imports to the UK from Europe meet EU-wide standards. However, this is not guaranteed to be the case following Brexit.

The potential for delays comes as additional checks on imported food would have to be carried out at British ports, with the cost being passed on to UK consumers.

Maintaining high levels of food safety standards across the UK following Brexit is imperative, and without a deal on this with the EU, additional checks will have to happen to protect British consumers from the market being flooded with unsafe food.

Brexit and Air Quality

Even without Brexit, the UK stands on the edge of a public health emergency in respect of air quality. Despite this, the government has had to be taken to both European and domestic courts to begin addressing the issue of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) levels. Unfortunately, the response to date has been inadequate and vital issues, such as particulates, lie outside of their strategy and remain dangerously unresolved.

Factoring in Brexit, there are serious concerns about what standards we will operate to once we have left the European Union. Any dilution of standards would be reckless and will have a detrimental impact on the public's health.

What Needs to Happen

The EU Withdrawal Bill, transposing all existing EU legislation wholesale into UK law, can't be anything more than a temporary fix. It is already clear that the Government is working on new food and environment bills.

Next steps

It is imperative that:

1. Government ensures that when legislation is repatriated into UK law following Brexit, environmental and public health-related regulations are maintained and where necessary strengthened, not watered down.
2. Government commits to working with professionals and sector experts to help shape future legislation and trade deals, so that environmental and public health standards in the UK are not undermined or traded away.

How You Can Help

Although Brexit poses many risks to environmental and public health standards in the UK, it also presents an opportunity to improve on what we already have.

We believe that it is imperative to highlight both the issues and the opportunities to government, and to ascertain what steps they are taking to ensure that standards don't slip and that this chance is not wasted.

As such, we would be very grateful if you would consider:

1. Tabling Written or Oral Parliamentary Questions
2. Tabling an EDM
3. Speaking in a debate
4. Writing to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union
5. Highlighting these concerns on social media

We would be very happy to draft any content to support your parliamentary activities around Brexit and environmental health, so please do let us know.

Contact

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