

PARALYTIC SHELLFISH POISONING

DAVID TONGE started his career in environmental health in the 1950s, working for two local authorities as District Health Inspector. From 1965 - 1974 he was Health Inspector for the Government of Zambia, with a brief to eradicate smallpox, control infections and communicable disease and expand preventative services in different areas of that country. From then, up to 1980 he worked in Malawi, as Lecturer in Public Health, specialising in teaching meat and food related subjects. His next two posts were in Saudi Arabia: four years spent as the Chief of Environmental Health of the Saudi Medical Services - monitoring operations on quality food and water supplies, 52 messhalls, swimming pool, liquid/solid waste disposal, and housing and sanitary accommodation for 16,000 international workforce; and the next year spent as Director of Health Care Services, monitoring the health services contract for the operation of the 130 bed hospital, 2 family neighbourhood clinics, 4 satellite clinics and a brigade dispensary. From 1986-1990, he worked as Senior Environmental Health Officer to the St. Helena Government in the South Atlantic, with special emphasis on directing the public cleansing and pest control services, and with the supervision of the building control service, plus all other environmental duties, pollution control, meat, food and food hygiene, port health and health education. From 1990, he has worked for the Department of Environmental Health with the Orkney Islands Council.

SUMMARY Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) results from eating certain types of shellfish affected by marine organisms containing a powerful toxin.

The danger time is in the summer months of May-August when the organisms multiply and the shellfish filter them out and concentrate the toxin.

For over twenty years, a surveillance programme to detect affected shellfish has been operating for shellfish collected off the East Coast of England and the coast of Scotland up to the River Forth estuary. In the past few years this has been extended to the full length of the Scottish East and West Coasts. Shellfish are collected between the months of March and September and tested for the toxin.

The Orkney Islands have been badly hit particularly between 1991 and 1995, resulting in action having to be taken under the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1985.

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