Role of the Radiation Protection Officer (RPO)

The term Radiation Protection Officer (RPO) does not appear in the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999. Nevertheless, the RPO has a crucial function in the CLEAPSS RPA Service. In effect, the RPO is the intermediary between the Radiation Protection Adviser (RPA) and the schools. The radiation employer needs to appoint an RPA to provide advice. The RPO will pass that advice on to schools and monitor the situation to ensure that it is implemented, as with other health and safety matters.

CLEAPSS will provide training courses for RPOs at a modest charge. There are three main aspects to the role.

1. Liaison with the RPA / CLEAPSS.
   Schools will not normally be in direct contact with the RPA. Information and advice will be channelled via the RPO. For all matters related to ionising radiations, etc, schools and RPOs should continue to contact the CLEAPSS Helpline.

2. Initial data collection
   The RPO will collect data from schools about the sources held and pass this on to the RPA. If the schools themselves provide the data, or if the data is fairly old, this will need checking, at least for a sample of schools. This is likely to be time-consuming. If the RPA identifies any problems with the data, the RPO will need to deal with these. Possible problems might include errors in the data, unidentifiable sources or a need to dispose of particular sources.

3. On-going monitoring
   The RPA will advise the RPO on the management and use of the sources held by schools. Mostly, this is likely to be based on CLEAPSS guide L93, Managing Ionising Radiations and Radioactive Substances in Schools, etc, customised for the situation in a particular local authority.
   The RPO will need to monitor that the advice is followed by schools, in accordance with the DfES guidance Health and Safety: Powers and Responsibilities. S/he will need to check from time to time that the record of sources is accurate, that sources are appropriately stored, that the log of source use is kept up to date, that sources are checked for leakage at suitable intervals and that the general source management and use is appropriate. CLEAPSS anticipates that monitoring visits to schools will be made at two yearly intervals although more frequent visits may be required where there are concerns that that the guidance in L093 is not being followed.