Reviewer's report

Title: Management of environmental health issues for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games: is enhanced integrated environmental health surveillance needed in every day operation?

Version: 1 Date: 11 October 2006

Reviewer: Pierre Gosselin

Reviewer's report:

General
An interesting paper with many qualities. It is clear, shows some interesting results and brings good suggestions for environmental health surveillance in similar contexts and countries.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Summary, p. 2: In the results section, it should be stated that the overall decrease trend is over time.

Methods, p. 6: While the A-B-C grading system for the 17 different inspections is mentioned, no explanation on the underlying criteria for these grades is presented nor does reference (9) provide any.

Methods, p. 7: Standardized guidelines for disinfection were apparently created by the the Olympic Planning Unit, but no reference is presented and we have no idea if those guidelines are in line with European or other international recommendations.

Methods, p. 8 (Figure 1): this reviewer is surprised by the lack of direct communication lines between the peripheral and central labs, and the apparently unidirectional links between the Olympic unit and its Ministry.

Methods, general: Nothing mentioned and no references presented about the laboratory methods used. It should also be stated what quality assessment/control methods and systems these various laboratories follow, if they are accredited (ISO or else). This is especially important for the more difficult analyses of virus and parasites (and their viability) as the overall program didn't show any positive results for Giardia, Crypto and viruses.

Methods, general: The reasons or criteria used to choose 5724 premises for inspection out of the possible total of 44741 should be presented (and discussed).

Results, p. 10: The total number of days of the Olympics and para-Olympics should be presented.

Results, p. 11: Data entry from peripheral labs should be explained too.

Results, p. 12: It is not clear whether the training of 865 hours is per inspector or the total for the 196 inspectors. Also, the acronym USPHS VSP is used for the first time and should be explained in full.

Results, p. 13: An "enhanced communicable diseases surveillance system" is mentioned without any further description or reference. It should be fully described as the discussion heavily rests on its performance.

Results, general: An overall coverage rate per inspection topic should be presented (and the performance discussed in comparison with existing recommendations or standards at the European or international levels).

Results and Discussion, general: Some results in Table 1 are rather intriguing. While the differences for hotels are somewhat explained and addressed, there are similar huge variations over time for Seacoast, Areas requiring pest control, Cooling towers that would need a word of explanation. Also, it is not clear whether these inspections are control ones or inspections of new sites, and it should be discussed as it can influence significantly the trends over time.

Discussion, p. 15: While I agree that the Olympics were an absolute success, this assertion should be referenced as this is a scientific paper :-) Also, the effectiveness of the environmental health surveillance program is in good part based on the corrective actions taken (it should be mentioned).

Discussion, p. 16: I believe (line #4) that it is the "un-successful" response that is illustrated by the 2003 outbreak, and it was corrected thereafter by the communication network.

Discussion, p. 17: The assertion "it is unlikely the small outbreaks may have gone undetected" is unwarranted given the lack of evidence/references regarding the communicable diseases surveillance system. Same comment about the next line stating that "insufficient infrastructure and limited time did not affect the effectiveness of the program". Please adjust the discussion accordingly. Some discussion about the hypothesis of possible corruption of inspectors (given the high economic stakes for hotels and restaurants) should also be include in the paper.
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

p. 15: the outbreak of salmonellosis (add 2003 for clarity)

p. 15 the word "formation (of inspection reports)" is not clear. Is it creation? or else?

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests