

# Healthy Planet News



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Welcome to Healthy Planet News! It will be published daily (22-25 June) during the Fourth

Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health by a coalition of NGOs coordinated by European Public Health Alliance Environment Network. We aim to keep you up to date with news and views from both the Ministerial Conference and the Healthy Planet Forum, the parallel civil society event. We will also provide you with policy messages developed by health and environmental non-governmental organisations.

The following recommendations are based on the "NGO Brussels Statement" developed at a preparatory workshop last year.

- Transfer of 2.5% of health spending from care and cure to prevention by 2007.
- Make financial commitments to support the outcome of this meeting, especially in relation to the newly independent states (NIS) and countries of central and Eastern Europe.
- Set targets and timetables for children's health.
- Implement the precautionary principle in chemical and pesticide control policy wherever substances are suspected of adverse impact on the health of children and adults.

Genon Jensen  
Director  
EPHA Environment Network (EEN)

22 June 2004

## WHO bids to unburden youth

The World Health Organization has produced figures for the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health that show the catastrophic effects of environmental factors on children's health in Europe.



Dr Roberto Bertollini

A total of 34% of all deaths in the 0-19 years age group in the pan-European region of 52 countries are due to five environmental causes: indoor and outdoor air pollution, unsafe water, lead and injuries. The findings are published in the World Health Organization's Environmental Burden of Disease (ERB) study.

The analysis shows that 13,000 deaths in the under 5 age-group are due to outdoor air pollution and another 10,000 due to indoor smoke from cooking and heating systems that use solid fuel. Over 5% of all deaths in children under 15 years are due to diarrhoeal disease resulting from poor water and sanitation facilities.

The WHO figures provide estimates of losses to "healthy life years" (DALYs). Lead poisoning,

causing brain stunting and other development problems, is responsible for over 1% of these losses to children in the region. Up to 30% of under-5s in urban areas of Europe have elevated levels of lead in their blood.

Dr Roberto Bertollini, Director of Health Determinants Division, WHO Regional Office for Europe says: "Although the report carries ominous warnings, it also opens the door to a healthier future for Europe's children." ■

## Today's Highlights

Children, policy and science seminar (9.00-18.00, Lehár Room, Budapest Congress Centre)

Registering environmental health complaints (14.00) see page 3

Health Rights seminar (ANPED and EEN).



Photo: Women's Environmental Network

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## Ministers urged to “go beyond”

Civil society groups fear that the proposed Ministerial Declaration will end up even weaker when it is signed on Friday.

“Our concern is that the commitment to chemical legislation and to the precautionary principle will be watered down,” says Genon Jensen, Director of the European Public Health Alliance Environment Network (EEN). “If they care about children’s health, Ministers should accept the stronger wording in the brackets. The Declaration should also make stronger reference to Table of Actions.”

The key documents at this meeting are:

**Conference Declaration** providing background on children’s environment and health and affirming previous commitments.

**CEHAPE** is the Children’s Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe. It provides an introduction to the main concerns for children’s health and recommends action be taken in four regional priority goals: safe water, fewer accidents, cleaner air, and reduced exposure to hazardous chemicals. It outlines the role of international collaboration and national action plans in implementation.

**Table of actions** outlines recommended, tried-and-tested interventions on children’s environment and health. These come from WHO, Member States, international agencies and NGOs. Ministers will not systematically review it, which has disappointed NGOs.

### What’s in the brackets?

CEHAPE contains no “brackets” (phrases or words left open for discussion) and only two remain in the Ministerial document. Both are important. The first is about the need for legislation on chemicals in children’s products; the other is whether Ministers “acknowledge” or “note” the WHO position on the precautionary principle.

### Modern risks overlooked

Professor Peter Helms of Aberdeen University, who represented EPHA on the CEHAPE working groups, comments: “What concerns me about CEHAPE is that it is strong on the more traditional sources of industrial pollution whereas the post-industrial or consumer-type exposure – which affect all countries in the WHO region – have much less clear targets. For example, the evidence of harm from environmental tobacco smoke on the under 5s is rock solid, yet the recommendations are weak.” ■



*“I live in Domodedovo. A big highway crosses the town. Many problems are connected to this. Constant noise and pollution are among them. Of course, green plants along the road save us, but not so much. The plants can not completely prevent influence of the road.”*

Alexander Nikiti features in EPHA Environment Network’s video to be screened on Thursday.

### Children first, all benefit

A booklet entitled “Children as agents for change” is being presented today during the science and policy workshop “Children in their environments: vulnerable, valuable and at risk” organised by European Environment Agency. It demonstrates that when social policy changes occur for the benefit of children, the same positive developments will follow for adults. Produced by the European Child Safety Alliance. ■

## Regional Priority Goal One: Safe Water

CEHAPE states: “We aim to prevent and significantly reduce the morbidity and mortality arising from gastrointestinal disorders and other health effects, by ensuring that adequate measures are taken to improve access to safe and affordable water and adequate sanitation for all children.”

NGOs’ concerns on safe water include children’s special

vulnerability to pesticides in water. With agricultural methods becoming increasingly intensive, greater pesticide use means that nitrates leach into underground water sources. Marked rises in the nitrate pollution of groundwater is taking place in Sweden, Finland, Germany, Eastern Europe and CIS countries.

Intensive agriculture also uses more

water, which is contributing to growing shortages in some parts of the region. In Tajikistan, up to half of deep aquifers are pumped beyond their annual recharge capacity.

### What needs to happen?

At an NGO meeting last December, the following priorities were identified:

## Network monitoring provides early warnings

An inexpensive system for registering the side effects of environment-related health problems should be replicated in all European countries, according to the Dutch Monitoring Network Health and Environment. Maureen Butter, who heads the Dutch project, is organising a workshop on this theme this afternoon. She says: "Most countries register reports of the adverse side-effects of pharmaceuticals but they should also monitor extreme reactions to modern hazards, such as hazardous waste sites and electromagnetic fields."

Some people are particularly vulnerable to chemicals and electromagnetic fields and they can help identify hazards for others. Miep Verheuel, one of the workshop speakers, describes himself as "a human canary". Just as miners use canaries to identify leaks of poisonous gases, Mr Verheuel says his extremely sensitive reactions to low concentrations of chemical substances can be used to provide others with an early warning of risk.

Registries can be usefully

established in the community and in workplaces. They have been shown to help in asthma prevention. The data contributes to pre-clinical trials and the process of gathering information contributes to environmental justice by helping to identify especially vulnerable groups and hazardous sites and products. ■

### Youthful democracy

A Youth Parliament people opens today with a press conference. It will propose a declaration to children and youths taking part in Budapest including Tunza, the UN Environment Programme group, 40 young Hungarians, some from the Roma community, a youth delegation from the UK who took part in EEN's participatory video project, a group from Young Minds, and young journalists invited by WHO. ■



*Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom eating an organic apple at the EPHA Environment Network stand having taken part in our survey on environment and health during Greenweek last month. She is shown here with Genon Jensen.*

- Ratification and implementation of previous commitments, in particular the Water Protocol (see page 4).
- A change of thinking on technology for safe water and sanitation. Water privatisation should not be promoted as the only means of reaching the goal of safe and affordable water for all. "Eco-sanitation" promoted by

Women in Europe for a Common Future costs much less than bringing in foreign private companies to install water and sewage pipes. Communities organise their own safe and sustainable use of water use and to build "dry separation" toilets to reduce groundwater contamination from faecal waste. The approach also requires

community advocacy for a shift away from pesticide and fertiliser use.

- Support instruments that enforce corporate responsibility. In Ukraine, women in MAMA 86 are using the Aarhus Convention to help communities challenge authorities in relation to water rights. ■

## What to do today?

Play your part in achieving the ratification of the Water Protocol. Access to clean water is more important than anything else to children's health in the poorest countries in Europe. Only four more signatures are needed for it to enter into force. Norway and Lithuania ratified earlier this year, which brought the number of signatories to 12 out of the 16 necessary.

If your country has not yet ratified, why not try and persuade your ministers that they should be next. Some countries have already signed while others, such as Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, where the percentage of the population without access to water varies from 7% up to 40%, have neither signed nor ratified. (More figures available at EEN stand)

### Status of Water Protocol

Countries that have ratified are: Albania, Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

Countries that have signed but not ratified are: Armenia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

Countries that have neither signed nor ratified: Andorra, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, San Marino, Serbia and Montenegro, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United States, Uzbekistan, and European Community. ■

## Make use of your delegation!

Genon Jensen, Policy Director of the European Public Health Alliance and Director of the EPHA Environment Network (EEN), and Sascha Gabizon, ECO-Forum, are civil society representatives on the European Environment and Health Committee and key contacts for putting over what you want said at the Ministerial Conference. Eighteen other civil society representatives can also request the right to speak in the Ministerial Conference. A list of all 20 delegates and their organizations is available at the EEN stand. There are also 10 observers.

Genon and Sascha are on the organising committee responsible for this meeting, the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC). It is made up of representatives from health ministries, environment ministries, intergovernmental organizations, such as UNICEF, and civil society

organizations, who are appointed by the World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe. Decisions about its future composition will be made in Budapest. ■

## Get in print!

Want to make some event or fact widely known? Heard an interesting quote? Please stop by at the EEN stand and we'll do our best to include it in tomorrow's *Healthy Planet News*. Deadline: 5 pm. ■

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## NAME, FAME and SHAME Corner

### Healthy Planet Award

To Norway and Lithuania for ratifying the Water Protocol earlier this year.

### Unhealthy Planet Award

To all those countries that have not ratified the Water Protocol.