



## PRESS RELEASE

### **30% emissions reduction target could save public health billions**

**Brussels, 14 September 2010** - Member State governments could radically improve public health and save on health care budgets if European Union climate policy were substantially strengthened. These ground-breaking findings are published by health and environment non-governmental organisations (NGOs) today.

The report, *Acting now for better health: A 30% target for EU climate policy*, commissioned by the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH Europe), provides the first-ever estimates of the health savings for different Member States should the European Union move from the current 20% target to a 30% target on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

For maximum savings to be made it is important for the EU to adopt an 'internal' rather than a 'with flexibility' target. An internal target means that the emissions are actually cut domestically in EU Member States rather than being achieved through buying emissions offsets from abroad.

Eight Member States would do particularly well from a higher target. Estimates for the year 2020 show that Germany could save up to €8.1 billion per year, Poland, France and Italy would be the next highest beneficiaries, and Belgium, Spain and the UK would benefit by up to \$900 million annually. (2)

For the EU as a whole, the anticipated benefits could be as high as €30.5 billion - equivalent to just under 0.2% of EU GDP.(3) These savings would be on top of the up to €52 billion health gains anticipated as a result of emission cuts to reach the EU's current 20% target. (4)

The findings go beyond recent European Commission figures on health benefits, which did not provide national figures and calculated health benefits on the basis of increased mortality due to exposure to air pollution only. The new analysis covers the costs of both death and ill-health, such as restricted activity due to heart and lung conditions, hospital costs, consultations, and medication.

The improvements in public health occur because as greenhouse gas emissions fall so do other air pollutants. These "side effects", or co-benefits, of climate change policy are an addition to the gains for health of avoiding the effects of climate change, such as heat waves, flooding or increases in infectious diseases. Thus, the report estimates may represent only the tip of the iceberg of the real health benefits of mitigating climate change.

Nevertheless, the calculated savings would make a substantial dent in the costs of implementing the 30% target. At up to €30.5 billion per year in 2020, they represent almost two-thirds of the Commission's estimate on implementation costs of €46 billion per year in 2020 (or 0.3% of EU GDP).

Génon Jensen, Executive Director of Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) said: "This study provides conclusive evidence that cleaner energy and cleaner air, associated with an immediate

move to 30% domestic cuts in greenhouse gases by 2020, would go a long way to paying for itself in better health through Europe."

On 14 October, the EU Environment Council will discuss its position on climate change policy. Ms Jensen hopes the report will prompt EU discussions on a 30% domestic target that put the health of Europe's citizens first.

Ms Jensen added: "The findings of this report present the EU with a much needed 'shot in the arm' for the global climate talks next month. We would like to see these new health impact figures clinch the deal so that Europe moves immediately and unilaterally to a 30% internal target prior to the Cancun meeting in December."

Hospitals in Europe, several of which are already "greening" their services (5), are feeling the impact of heat waves and floods. In 2003, the August heat wave killed an estimated 40,000 people but many more were admitted to hospital. In the UK, hospital admissions among the elderly increased by 16% during the year.

"Health cost savings from strong climate action will be welcome news to governments," says Anja Leetz, Executive Director, Health Care Without Harm Europe. "The figures show that acting now would mean 140,000 fewer consultations for asthma and upper respiratory conditions per year by 2020 and thousands of fewer hospital admissions for cardiac and respiratory problems."

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#### Notes to Editors

1. The full report and a background briefing are available at [www.env-health.org/r/93](http://www.env-health.org/r/93) and <http://www.noharm.org/europe/issues/climate/>
2. Full breakdowns of EU and country benefits are included in tables in the report.
3. The estimate of health co-benefit at between €10.6 and €30.5 billion per year is associated with an EU internal, or domestic, 30% target. The European Commission more often refers to a 30% target "with flexibility", which allows some emission reductions to occur in third countries. The report shows a health benefit associated with this second option in the range of €5-14.6 billion. All estimates in the new report show annual figures for the year 2020 as chosen by the European Commission in its studies.
4. The estimate was originally developed in HEAL's earlier report with CAN Europe, WWF (2008). *The co-benefits to health of a strong EU climate change policy*. [http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits\\_to\\_health\\_report\\_-september\\_2008.pdf](http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits_to_health_report_-september_2008.pdf)
5. Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe, which has recently produced a joint report with the World Health Organization entitled "Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Planet, Healthy People, Addressing climate change in health care settings". (See [www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org))

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Diana G. Smith, Communications, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), Email: [Diana@env-health.org](mailto:Diana@env-health.org) Mobile phone: +00 33 6 33 04 2943. She can arrange telephone interviews with medical experts and others. Quotes from medical, health care and patient experts are also included in the Background Briefing available at [www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org) and <http://www.noharm.org/europe/issues/climate/>

**The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)** aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection improves health. It brings together more than 60 organizations working at the European level. Website: [www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org)

**Health Care Without Harm (HCWH)** is a global coalition of more than 440 organizations in 52 countries working with the health sector to reduce its impact on human health and the environment while advocating for global environmental health. [www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org)