



PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

MEPs to be urged to address "missing link" in fight against cancer

Brussels, 26 November 2010 – Cancer survivors and health groups want European leaders to improve environmental policy that could hold down rising incidence rates.

At a debate in the European Parliament organised by the Health and Environment Alliance next Monday (1), Sandra Steingraber - a scientist, cancer survivor and author of *Living Downstream* (2) - will talk about the ways in which environmental policy can tackle the links between exposure to environmental pollutants and cancer, and exchange lessons learned on regulatory responses.

One half of all the world's cancers occur among people living in industrialized countries which hold less than one fifth of the world's population, she says. Lifestyle factors - that is behaviour that we choose, such as drinking and smoking, are important. But environmental contaminants, such as industrially-produced chemicals and pesticide residues, that we ingest unintentionally from our food and water, are also playing a role. These contaminants include hormone disruptors, such as BPA.

Sandra Steingraber says that although scientists are well aware of the role environmental factors are playing in cancer, the public and politicians are not yet sufficiently aware. "The disconnect between what we in the scientific community know and what patients are told is huge," she will tell MEPs, health, environment and patient groups, and scientists in a debate illustrated with excerpts from her new film. She sees her role as helping to close that gap. (3)

One of the ways to prevent cancers is by eliminating the cancer-related chemicals that are currently in widespread industrial and agricultural use. People are exposed to chemicals contained in everyday products because they invade our food, water and air. European policy makers are in a unique position to show how ambitious EU environment policies, when properly implemented, not only protect our everyday environment but can actually contribute to reducing cancer rates, and other health conditions.

"Preventing cases of cancer is an issue that people care deeply about, and a way that national and EU regulators can show citizens that the EU matters. Without any doubt, EU environmental policies can contribute to cancer prevention, and could do more," says Genon Jensen, Executive Director of Health and Environment Alliance. "Important pesticide and chemical legislation is already in place but sluggish implementation is compromising their effectiveness in cancer prevention."

Dr Andrew Watterson from the University of Stirling UK will tell the meeting that the incidence of cancer is growing in the European Union. He will present predictions on cancer incidence rates to 2020. (4)

For this event, the Health and Environment Alliance and the European Cancer Patients Coalition and Forum Against Cancer Europe have joined forces to raise awareness and highlight prevention opportunities in EU environmental policies. Cancer groups have compiled 'Environment and Cancer testimonies', which provide a snapshot of various patients' groups' concerns and priorities for action on environmental prevention by member states and the EU. The testimonies show that cancer patients are increasingly concerned about chemicals in our environment, and want the environment cleaned up to help them avoid a recurrence. For example, a Belgium patient notes that many farmers in his neighbourhood are still using forbidden pesticides. (5) These concerns reflect public opinion surveys findings in the EU. A recent Eurobarometer shows that pesticide residues in food are a number one worry for 72% of EU consumers, a higher percentage than in 2005.(6)

At the end of her presentation, Sandra Steingraber will call on participants to join a worldwide health and environment movement made up of "carcinogen abolitionists". Genon Jensen will add that the movement in Europe aims to phase out not only the chemicals that are "carcinogens" but also the endocrine disrupting chemicals that act as a contributory factor in triggering cancer, and other health disorders.

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Notes for journalists

1. Details at www.env-health.org. Invitation on request.
2. Living Downstream, 1998, Sandra Steingraber, page 60
3. Film trailer available at http://www.livingdownstream.com/about_the_film.php
4. New EU figure developed by Dr Andrew Watterson and HEAL will be available at www.env-health.org from 18.30 on Monday 29 November.
5. "Environment and Cancer testimonials" will be available at www.env-health.org from 18.30 on Monday 29 November.
6. Food-related risks, Special Eurobarometer 354, November 2010 <http://www.food-label-compliance.com/Sites/5/Downloads/Eurobarometer-Food-Related-Risks-EFSA-2010.pdf>

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection and sustainability improves health and to empower the health community to contribute their expertise to policy making. Since its inception, HEAL's membership has grown to include a diverse network of more than 50 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organizations across Europe which together have a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debates and the decision-making process. Website: www.env-health.org

Chemicals Health Monitor Project (CHM) was launched by HEAL, CHEM Trust, Collaborative on Health and Environment and others in March 2007. It aims to improve public health by ensuring that key scientific evidence on the links between chemicals and ill-health are translated into policy as quickly as possible. Key documents about the campaign and information about the project can be found at: www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org