



INFORMATION RELEASE

Research quantifies increased life and wealth from cleaner air

Brussels, 4 March 2011 - EU-supported research findings by the Aphekom project (1) show that significant health and monetary benefits could result from further reducing current levels of air pollution in European cities.

Project coordinator, Dr. Sylvia Medina of the French Institute for Public Health Surveillance (InVS), said: "Our project shows that compliance with WHO's annual air-quality guideline on PM_{2.5} fine particles (10 micrograms/cubic metre) in 25 large European cities (2) could both add up to 22 months of life expectancy for persons 30 years of age and older, and produce 31.5 billion euros in monetary health benefits every year."

The findings were released at a stakeholders meeting in Saint-Maurice just outside Paris on Wednesday, 2 March 2011. (3)

HEAL hopes full use will be made of these and other EU funded studies to launch ambitious legislative proposals.

"The results of the Aphekom project show that action for cleaner air pays off in health benefits," says Anne Stauffer, Deputy Director, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), who took part in the stakeholders meeting.

The findings come at an important time. The European Commission is currently preparing for a review of EU air quality policy.

Air pollution of fine particles is associated with more than 455,000 premature deaths every year in the EU's 27 member states, according to a recent study by the European Topic Centre on Air and Climate Change (ETC/ACC) on behalf of the European Environment Agency (EEA).

Early evidence of what improving air pollution can do for health came from Dublin, Ireland, where respiratory health improved substantially following the ban on coal burning in 1990. Examples of what the recent introduction of congestion charges in London and Stockholm have done for health were discussed at the meeting.

Living near busy roads

The new research which looks at 25 cities in 12 European countries also shows that living near busy roads substantially increases the total burden of disease attributable to air pollution.

"We also determined that living near busy roads could be responsible for 15 percent of asthma in children and possibly for similar or higher percentages of other common chronic respiratory and cardiovascular diseases in adults 65 and over," Sylvia Medina said.

Anne Stauffer hopes the Aphekom findings will also be taken into account in other EU public health policy areas, such as healthy ageing and reducing inequalities. "Environmental determinants of health such as air pollution should be a concern for the EU's healthy ageing initiative, which aims to increase healthy lifespan by two years by 2020. Cleaner air can also help to reduce health inequalities as poorer families are more likely to live in polluted areas."

Cost-benefit analysis

A recent report by the US Environment Protection Agency (EPA) demonstrates that policies aimed at cleaner air more than pay for themselves. "The Benefits and Costs of the Clean Air Act from 1990 to 2020" shows that the benefits of avoiding early death, preventing heart attacks and asthma attacks, and reducing the number of sick days for employees far exceed costs of implementing clean air protections. (4)

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Notes

1. Aphekom (Improving Knowledge and Communication for Decision Making on Air Pollution and Health in Europe) aims to help decision makers set more effective European, national and local policies; health professionals to better advise vulnerable individuals; and all Europeans to better protect their health.
2. The 25 cities in descending order of predicted average gain in life expectancy for persons of 30 years of age and over for a decrease in average annual level of PM2.5 to 10ug/m3 (WHO's Air Quality Guideline) are Bucharest, Budapest, Barcelona, Athens, Rome, Sevilla, Ljubljana, Valencia, Granada, Vienna, Lille, Paris, Lyon, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Bilbao, Rouen, Le Havre, Toulouse, London, Malaga, Dublin and Stockholm.
3. Aphekom press release and other information about the findings and meeting at <http://www.aphekom.org>
4. US EPA press release, 1 March 2011, EPA report underscores Clean Air Act's successful public health protections: <http://www.epa.gov/>

The 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 65 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