



PRESS RELEASE

"Paris Appeal Third International Congress"

Children's health and the environment, 12-13 April 2011

Organised by ARTAC with partners, International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE) and Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL).

Protect children by cutting exposure to harmful chemicals

Paris, France, 12 April 2011 - Bringing down rates of childhood cancer, congenital malformations, developmental problems, and asthma and allergy cannot be achieved without reducing exposure to certain chemicals, according to Génon Jensen, Executive Director of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL).

Ms Jensen is taking part in the Paris Appeal Third International Congress on Children's health and the environment, 12-13 April 2011. (1) Since the first Paris Appeal conference, thousands of scientists and citizens have signed the consensus statement, demonstrating their concern about the effects of a deteriorating environment on public health. "We believe today's focus on children's health and environment will bring home the message to both policy-makers and the public about the urgency to act now," Ms Jensen says.

"Paris Appeal congresses bring together the biggest group of international experts on how the environment affects health in Europe," she says. "The conclusions from these meetings are based on the very latest science. Such statements provide a solid foundation for advocates to push for better laws and pilot projects that show what needs to be done. Strong representation from the medical community at the congresses shows recognition of the need to see policy change."

More than 250 scientists and medical professionals are expected to take part in the congress. Speakers from around the world will address the links between exposure to environmental pollutants in children and in utero with worrying trends in cancer, developmental problems and congenital abnormalities, declining fertility in young men, and high rates of asthma and allergy.

Prof Ana Soto, Tufts University School of Medicine, USA will present her findings on the fetal origin of cancer.

Rates of cancer in childhood, congenital malformation of the penis, and infertility in young men are all growing in Europe. Cancer in children is increasing at a rate of more than 1% per year in Europe.

"There is a misconception that cancer is either an inherited disease or only related to life-style factors, such as tobacco and alcohol," says Genon Jensen, Executive Director of HEAL. "But these factors cannot account for rising rates of cancer in children. Many cases of cancer in children are due to environmental pollution and are therefore preventable."

HEAL wants to see certain synthetic chemicals removed from the market and replaced with less harmful substitutes. "We want to take the latest science to decision-makers so that they do not miss the current policy opportunities associated with the EU chemical law, such as REACH and pesticide legislation that is currently being implemented." (2)

Reducing exposure to environmental pollutants before birth and in childhood is particularly important because children's bodies are more sensitive to damage because they are growing. Many infants are exposed to harmful chemicals before they are born. This is a result of industrial chemicals in umbilical-cord blood, which may increase the future risk of some chronic diseases.

HEAL's mission includes bringing latest science to EU and national politicians and raising awareness of the links between environmental factors and health among the medical and health community and the public.

Present campaigns and projects all take the theme of "Protecting the most vulnerable" and aim to bring the perspectives of the medical and health community to the development and implementation of EU chemicals and pesticides policy. This approach gives special focus to pre- and post-natal vulnerability of children to harmful chemicals and the need to address the cocktail effect. For example, the "Sick of pesticides" campaign raises awareness of the health impacts of pesticides and aims to help achieve a ban on cosmetic pesticide use in public spaces, especially those where children play such as parks, playgrounds, schools and around health facilities.

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Notes for journalists

1. Congress programme available here http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Paris_Appeal_Programme_EN.pdf and ARTAC press pack available here http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/dossier_presse-1.pdf
2. HEAL concerns and policy demands: Children's health and environment http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/20110411_HEAL_policy_demands_-_Childrens_Env_and_Health.pdf