

# Health and Environment Alliance

## Putting health at the centre of environment issues

### *About us*

#### **Who we are:**

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), formerly EPHA Environment Network (EEN), is an international not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation that aims to improve health through public policy that promotes a cleaner and safer environment. Our vision is that of a healthy planet for healthy people.

Set up in 2003, we have made significant inroads into ensuring that health is a priority for environmental policy-makers and the environmental community. In these few years, we have increased the health representation of public and expert voices in debates taking place at the European and international level. This has had the effect of bolstering scientific, technical and citizens' expertise, particularly on chemicals and health.

We have grown into a diverse network of citizens', patients', women's, health professionals', academic and environmental organisations across Europe with a strong track record in bringing environmental health science and policy to an increasing number of fora.

Our underlying philosophy is based on a belief in the fundamental human right to a healthy environment and environmental justice for all, especially for those most marginalized. It extends to the larger goals of social change – namely economic and social justice and good governance.

#### **What we aim to do:**

- Advocate the introduction and implementation of policies that protect the environment as a means to improving people's health in Europe and the rest of the world.
- Promote awareness of environmental and other policy changes that can help or hinder progress towards health and sustainable development.
- Encourage and support the participation of citizens, especially health professionals, health-affected groups, youth and disadvantaged groups, in policy making at the European level.
- Mobilise stakeholders across all sectors on key environment and health issues.



## Joining our network

The Health & Environment Alliance is a growing platform open to not-for-profit organisations. It includes a wide variety of groups, such as:

- non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
- health professional bodies representative of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers as well as alternative medicine practitioners;
- health affected groups;
- disease prevention and health advocacy groups;
- women's and community groups;
- academic institutions and scientific associations;
- other not-for-profit organisations.

To join immediately, visit our website:

[www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org)

## Our structure

The governing bodies of the Health and Environment Alliance are the Executive Committee and the General Assembly.

**The General Assembly** comprises the entire membership. It determines and authorises the broad policy guidelines of the Alliance. It meets once a year in Brussels.

**The Executive Committee** is elected by the General Assembly for a period of two years renewable. It is responsible for overseeing the annual work programme, financial management, and the secretariat.

## How we work

### Monitoring:

EU developments that may affect environmental health, such as public health policy, chemical safety legislation and regulations on air quality.

### Harnessing expertise:

The health and environment science needed to effectively advocate for policy that protects and promotes health.

### Gathering perspectives:

Viewpoints on key issues are developed with the help of working groups made up of members, partners and scientific experts. Policy priorities are set by Members at the Annual General Meeting.

### Creating partnerships:

Advocacy activities are strengthened by working with other health and environment bodies, such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the US-based Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE) and Brussels-based environmental groups.

### Advocacy with policy makers:

Evidence is conveyed to those in a position to influence policy via personal contact, meetings, publications, email alerts and a well-referenced website. Press releases are issued to encourage positive coverage of important topics and events.

### Capacity building:

Representation of the wider Europe is encouraged with the help of training for advocacy and communication in countries likely to accede to the European Union in the coming years.

## *Our priorities*

The Health and Environment Alliance supports precautionary health and environment policy within two main frameworks. They are the European Union's Health and Environment Strategy and the World Health Organization's environment and health process, which includes the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe, known as CEHAPE.

Our work draws on the findings of the environmental health science revolution, which is revealing the impact of environmental degradation on health in an ever-widening range of diseases and conditions. These include amongst others, asthma, allergies, cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, reproductive problems, behavioural problems and obesity.

### **Key messages**

- Many diseases and conditions, including birth defects, could be effectively prevented by changes in public policy as well as changes in personal behaviour and lifestyles.
- Greater priority should be given to ensuring the safety of what we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe.
- The special needs of children and other vulnerable groups should be given more recognition in environmental policy affecting health.

### **Our ideas for change**

#### **A toxic free world:**

The vast majority of chemicals on the market in Europe today have not been tested for their effects on human health. Even if they had been, safety standards are currently set for adult males rather than children or the unborn child. According to the World Health Organization, infants are especially vulnerable to toxic contamination because they absorb proportionally a greater quantity of what they eat and drink, and the air they breathe than adults. Forty per cent of the environmental burden of disease falls on children. See: [www.cehape.env-health.org](http://www.cehape.env-health.org)

#### **Stay Healthy, Stop Mercury:**

The European Commission estimates that hundreds of thousands of children in Europe have mercury in their bodies at levels likely to affect their neurodevelopment. Many women who are planning to become pregnant are unaware of the risks to their unborn children, or to their young families. Many health professionals are unaware that there are reliable alternatives to the medical devices that contain mercury. Governments urgently need to work towards phasing out mercury globally, and increasing awareness of its health risks.

#### **Making climate change a health story:**

Extremely hot weather caused tens of thousands of deaths across Europe in 2003; worse storms result in more deaths during floods. Increasing temperatures and gaps in the ozone layer are also responsible for more skin cancers and food poisonings and the threat of a return to Europe of some tropical diseases, such as malaria. Public policy needs to mitigate against the worst effects of climate change on peoples' health and lives, and raise greater awareness of the potential health impacts to push for further reductions in greenhouse gases.

#### **Promoting clean air:**

Clear evidence exists that air pollution leads to an increase in respiratory disease and heart attacks. It presents a major problem for asthmatics. Much of this burden of disease can be prevented by better control of air quality regulation.

#### **Increasing public voices:**

It is widely accepted that policy is more likely to be effective in meeting its objectives when citizens' viewpoints are taken into account. Representation of the perspectives of disadvantaged people, women, children and young people is particularly important because they often face greater barriers in articulating their views.

**The following groups make up the membership of the Health and Environment Alliance** (November 2006):

Akut	Luxembourg	<a href="http://www.akut.lu/">www.akut.lu/</a>
Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment	Armenia	<a href="http://www.awhhe.am/index.htm">www.awhhe.am/index.htm</a>
Association for Research and Treatments Against Cancer	France	<a href="http://www.artac.info/">www.artac.info/</a>
Breast Cancer UK	United Kingdom	<a href="http://www.nomorebreastcancer.org">www.nomorebreastcancer.org</a>
British Medical Association – European Office	Belgium	<a href="http://www.bma.org.uk/">www.bma.org.uk/</a>
Center for Reproductive Health and Environment “Perzent”	Uzbekistan	<a href="http://www.perzent.org/">www.perzent.org/</a>
Centre for Environmental Law and Policy	Hungary	<a href="http://www.cepl.ceu.hu/">www.cepl.ceu.hu/</a>
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health	United Kingdom	<a href="http://www.cieh.org/">www.cieh.org/</a>
Croatian Nurses Association	Croatia	<a href="http://www.hums.hr/">www.hums.hr/</a>
Department of Earth Sciences and Clinical Microbiology	Sweden	<a href="http://www.uu.se/">www.uu.se/</a>
Dutch Monitoring Network for Health and Environment	The Netherlands	<a href="http://www.mngm.nl/">www.mngm.nl/</a>
Earth Forever Foundation	Bulgaria	<a href="http://www.earthforever.org">www.earthforever.org</a>
ECO Counselling Centre Galati	Romania	<a href="http://www.cceg.ro/eng/indexECCG.htm">www.cceg.ro/eng/indexECCG.htm</a>
English Nature	United Kingdom	<a href="http://www.english-nature.org.uk/">www.english-nature.org.uk/</a>
Environment & Health Non-governmental Organization (EcoTox)	Armenia	n/a
Espace Environnement	Belgium	<a href="http://www.espace-environnement.be/">www.espace-environnement.be/</a>
European Academy for Environmental Medicine	Germany	<a href="http://www.europaem.de">www.europaem.de</a>
European Child Safety Alliance	European	<a href="http://www.childsafetyeurope.org">www.childsafetyeurope.org</a>
European Council for Classical Homeopathy	European	<a href="http://www.homeopathy-ecch.org/">www.homeopathy-ecch.org/</a>
European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients’ Association	European	<a href="http://www.efanet.org">www.efanet.org</a>
European Lung Foundation	European	<a href="http://www.european-lung-foundation.org/">www.european-lung-foundation.org/</a>
European Network for Smoking Prevention	European	<a href="http://www.ensp.org">www.ensp.org</a>
European Public Health Alliance	European	<a href="http://www.ephpa.org">www.ephpa.org</a>
European Respiratory Society	European	<a href="http://www.ersnet.org">www.ersnet.org</a>
Green Doctors - ISDE UKRAINE	Ukraine	<a href="http://www.isde.org">www.isde.org</a>
Health and Environmental Care Technical Organisation	Belgium	<a href="http://www.hector-asbl.be">www.hector-asbl.be</a>
Health Development Promotional and Educational Center	Serbia	n/a
Initiativ Liewensufank (IBFAN Luxembourg)	Luxembourg	<a href="http://www.ibfan.org">www.ibfan.org</a>
Institut d’Hygiène du Hainaut	Belgium	<a href="http://www.hainaut.be/">www.hainaut.be/</a>
Institute for Ecological Modernisation	Bulgaria	<a href="http://www.enviro-link.org/">www.enviro-link.org/</a>
Inter-Environnement Wallonie	Belgium	<a href="http://www.iewonline.be">www.iewonline.be</a>
International Network on Children’s Health, Environment & Safety	International	<a href="http://www.inchesnetwork.net/">www.inchesnetwork.net/</a>
International School for Sustainable Development	Italy	n/a
International Society of Doctors for the Environment	International	<a href="http://www.isde.org/">www.isde.org/</a>
Irish Doctors’ Environmental Association	Ireland	<a href="http://www.ideaireland.org/">www.ideaireland.org/</a>
ISDE Austria	Austria	<a href="http://www.aegu.net">www.aegu.net</a>
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine	United Kingdom	<a href="http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/">www.lshtm.ac.uk/</a>
Macedonian Association of Doctors for the Environment	Macedonia	<a href="http://www.isde.org/macedonia.html">www.isde.org/macedonia.html</a>
Network Children’s Health and Environment	Germany	<a href="http://www.netzwerk-kindergesundheit.de">www.netzwerk-kindergesundheit.de</a>
Pesticides Action Network Europe	European	<a href="http://www.pan-europe.info">www.pan-europe.info</a>
PIN for Health	Croatia	<a href="http://www.pinforhealth.hr">www.pinforhealth.hr</a>
Platform Health and Environment	The Netherlands	<a href="http://www.gezondheidsmilieu.nl/">http://www.gezondheidsmilieu.nl/</a>
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	United Kingdom	<a href="http://www.rosipa.org">www.rosipa.org</a>
Society for Sustainable Living	Czech Republic	<a href="http://www.stuz.cz">www.stuz.cz</a>
South Sefton PCT – Department of Public Health	United Kingdom	<a href="http://www.southsefton-pct.nhs.uk">www.southsefton-pct.nhs.uk</a>
Stop Poison Santé	Belgium	<a href="http://www.stopoisonsante.com">www.stopoisonsante.com</a>
Sustainable World Foundation	Bulgaria	n/a
University of Medicine Department of Environmental Health	Romania	<a href="http://www.umfcluj.ro">www.umfcluj.ro</a>
Women and Mothers against Violence	Bulgaria	n/a
Women in Europe for a Common Future	European	<a href="http://www.wefc.org">www.wefc.org</a>

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