



HEAL Newsletter Editorials

March 2008 - March 2009

A monthly update for the health and environment community in Europe

February – March 2008

Editorial: European environmental health action plan receives mid-term review

Frédérique Ries, Member of the European Parliament and rapporteur on environmental health, has expressed her concerns on the future effects on health of chemicals, indoor air quality and climate change at a [European parliamentary workshop on the mid-term review of the EU Environment and Health Action plan](#) on 6 March 2008. Hosting the meeting, she said the funding of the entire programme was a worry, particularly on human biomonitoring, the linkages between environmental health and EU chemicals policy (REACH), and the effects of electromagnetic frequencies on health.

Later in March, the [European Parliament](#) will critically consider its reaction to progress and give direction to future action on the EU Environment and Health Action Plan. At the end of last year, EU Environment and Health ministers highlighted the need for better financing of this plan, and a post-2010 strategy to ensure it continues (read [HEAL related article](#)). Meanwhile, the [WHO-led "First High Level Preparatory Meeting" on Environment and Health](#) took place in Milan earlier this week. This EEHC gathering will guide planning for the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health taking place in Rome next year. During the three-day meeting (10-12 March 2008), European governments reaffirmed their commitment to reducing negative environmental impacts on health, giving special attention to inequality and climate change. A report in Italy predicts an average 3 per cent increase in deaths for each degree Celsius of temperature rise.

If you want to know more about where, when, how and by whom your health is

protected at the European level from pollution, environmental health determinants and other health stressors, our new ["Health and Environment Primer"](#) can provide you with the answers. Around, 90% of all environmental health law of Member States originates from the EU, its institutions and agencies. The EU is also considered to be an international leader in many areas of health as it relates to environmental protection.

Coming up:

- ▶ Launch of publication series on Breast cancer and the environment, 2 April
- ▶ Launch of competition on climate change & health good practice awards for local and regional authorities, 7 April, World Health Day

Editorial: New scientific report on breast cancer and chemicals urges policy-makers to “prevent the preventable”

Around 1 in 10 women in Europe will develop breast cancer. Bringing down this figure cannot be achieved without reducing exposure to certain chemicals, according to a report launched by the Health & Environment Alliance (HEAL) and CHEM Trust during a lunchtime event in the European Parliament on April 2. The report entitled: "Breast cancer and exposure to hormonally active chemicals: An appraisal of the scientific evidence" was written by a leading EU researcher on endocrine disrupters, Professor Andreas Kortenkamp, Head of the Centre for Toxicology at the School of Pharmacy, University of London. This scientific review focuses on the role of hormone disrupting chemicals, with particular reference to early life and multiple chemical exposures ([read more](#)).

With the EU chemicals legislation REACH being implemented, policy-makers have a concrete opportunity ahead of them to translate the scientific recommendations into policy action and to reduce chemicals' contribution to the breast cancer incidence rate. For example, EU member states and the new European Chemicals Agency, at the instruction of the European Commission, can ensure that hormone-disrupting chemicals are placed on both the candidate this year and the priority list next year for the authorization procedure. Another political opportunity is provided for by the EU pesticides policy reform. "Cut-off criteria" should be introduced to ban from sale on the market any pesticide that acts as a hormone disruptor or as a carcinogen, mutagen and reproductive toxic (CMR).

The report's message that tougher controls are needed on man-made chemicals resonated across the European media, with coverage on Euronews and several national television stations, a feature on the largest German public radio Deutschlandfunk (DLF) and articles in the Guardian on-line, Le

Monde, Euroactiv and the British Medical Journal among others.

As part of their breast cancer and chemicals work, HEAL and CHEM Trust also launched a series of educational and advocacy resources available in several EU languages on the [Chemicals Health Monitor project website](#), or in hard copy [upon request](#).

Highlights and coming up:

- ▶ [Apply for the good practice awards on climate change and health BY 15 MAY](#)
- ▶ [HEAL/EUREGHA Conference: "Climate change and the challenges for public health: engaging the regions", 24 June 2008](#)
- ▶ Become a HEAL individual supporter: Do you share HEAL's goal of improving people's health through better environment policy? It is now possible for individuals who share HEAL's vision of a healthy planet for healthy people to become supporters of HEAL. [Read more](#).

Editorial: Political developments accelerate on the effect of chemicals on our health

On 1 June 2008, a new regulatory body on chemical safety opens its doors. The European Chemical Agency (ECHA) in Helsinki will play a significant role in both the approval and the banning of chemicals on the European market. NGOs responsible for monitoring the implementation of the EU's chemical safety legislation, REACH will be paying close attention to the opportunities and challenges presented for public health and environmental protection by the Agency's work (read the [NGO media advisory](#)).

This important event comes at a time of two other key developments in chemical safety policy. One is the recent Canadian government decision to declare bisphenol A "dangerous" foreshadowing regulatory action. This is probably the first regulatory body anywhere in the world to take such a decision. The reverberations have been widespread both in North America and in Europe. In the UK, the largest parenting organisation, the National Child Birth Trust, stated that Bisphenol A represents a risk from baby feeding bottles and highlighted [actions](#) to eliminate or reduce baby exposure. At the EU level, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has announced a review of advice on safe levels of bisphenol A (BPA) in food packaging. In Washington DC, a key Democratic senator has strongly criticised the US Food and Drug Agency (FDA) for its approval of bisphenol A, and introduced a bill to ban the substance (read [HEAL related article](#)).

Equally significant is a decision on another chemical against which NGOs have been campaigning for a long time. The outcome of a legal dispute between the European Commission and several Member States, Norway and the European Parliament, has been the reinstatement of a ban against deca-BDE, a brominated flame retardant. From 1 July 2008, it will be illegal to place on the EU market electronic goods containing deca-BDE under the EU

restriction of hazardous substances (ROHS) directive. The European Commission has stated that it will not dispute the decision (read [HEAL related article](#)).

Concurrently, NGOs across the world are promoting a safer approach to international chemicals management via the SAICM Global Outreach campaign of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN). Join HEAL and others by endorsing and helping promote the Common Statement at <http://www.ipen.org/campaign/statement.html> (read [HEAL related article](#)).

Highlights and coming up:

► [HEAL/EUREGHA Conference: "Climate change and the challenges for public health: engaging the regions"](#), 24 June 2008

► Become a HEAL individual supporter: Do you share HEAL's goal of improving people's health through better environment policy? It is now possible for individuals who share HEAL's vision of a healthy planet for healthy people to become supporters of HEAL. [Read more](#)

Editorial: EU needs more ambitious strategy to tackle climate change and avoid public health crisis

As EU Ministers discussed in Paris the future of climate change and the EU's energy policy, HEAL called on them to cut domestic greenhouse gas emissions by at least 30% by 2020 rather than 20% by 2020, in line with the International panel on Climate Change 25-40% recommendation (read [HEAL open letter "Turning Effort Sharing into Benefit Sharing"](#)). Ministers must consider not just the costs but also the benefits of tackling climate change effectively and rapidly. Most of these benefits are linked to improved health, particularly those related to obesity, cardio-respiratory and mental health, reduced air pollution and accidents.

HEAL's call was also highlighted in the HEAL and European REGIONAL Local Health Authorities (EUREGHA) conference recommendations at a meeting held in Brussels on 24 June: "[Climate change and the challenges for public health: Engaging the regions](#)". The conference recommendations are now open for signatures by sending an email to the [HEAL Secretariat](#). We urge you to sign up!

Genon Jensen, Executive Director of HEAL, stated at the conference that *"climate change and the lack of action to tackle the problem is a public health disaster happening in Europe and the world today. Unless Ministers, Parliamentarians and decision makers act ambitiously and show leadership now within the EU and internationally, the prediction is a public health catastrophe that even the best health systems will be unable to cope with."*

At the conference, [good practice awards](#) were handed to health groups taking action on climate change and protecting health from current climate change effects.

For further information on Health and Climate Change sign up to [HEAL list serve](#).

Editorial: Urgent review of electromagnetic fields exposure required

Mobile phones and Wi-Fi connections, as well as the vast array of wired and wireless technologies we benefit from today, are becoming an issue of growing health concern. Warnings from scientists, health agencies, governments and professional scientific organisations worldwide about the possible health risks and long-term effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMF) have been steadily growing.

A landmark report in August 2007 from the [BioInitiative Working Group](#), which brought together scientists, researchers and public health policy professionals from around the world reviewed more than 2000 published scientific studies on electromagnetic fields. The BioInitiative Report concluded there are serious scientific concerns about current limits regulating how much EMF is allowable from power lines, cell phones, and many other sources of exposure in daily life. It also concluded that existing standards for public safety are inadequate to protect public health.

Exposure to EMF has been linked to a variety of health problems and diseases ranging from sleeping disorders and allergies to childhood and breast cancer. The use of cell phones for 10 years or more is found to double the risk of malignant brain tumors. Power line EMF exposure is likely responsible for hundreds of new cases of child leukaemia every year in the United States, Europe and around the world, according to scientific evidence presented in the BioInitiative Report and the World Health Organization. Some EU governments have already taken action to reduce EMF exposure. In

France, the Health Ministry issued a public warning on the effects of EMF and advised minimising the use of mobile phone, especially by children. The French National Library (BNF) decided to put on hold the installation of Wi-Fi systems within all its buildings. In Germany, the government advises its citizens to use wired Internet

connections instead of Wi-Fi and landlines instead of mobile phones.

After the publication of the BioInitiative Report, the European Environment Agency (EEA) itself called for immediate action to reduce exposure to EMF. Professor Jacqueline McGlade, the EEA's executive director, said: "Recent research and reviews on the long-term effects of radiations from mobile telecommunications suggest that it would be prudent for health authorities to recommend actions to reduce exposures, especially to vulnerable groups, such as children." A further delay could lead to a health crisis similar to those caused by asbestos, smoking and lead in petrol, EEA says.

Despite the mounting evidence and numerous calls by governments, scientists and the EEA, today we are still living with the same old standards that do not take into account the worrying new data. The Health & Environment Alliance advocates for regulatory and preventative actions to be taken as soon as possible by the EU. In particular, HEAL calls for a review of all EMF regulations based on the new findings during the next Parliamentary term. In this issue of the newsletter, we present a collection of recent articles and HEAL membership activities on EMF. In doing so, we hope to raise awareness and engage new groups around this significant public health hazard. (Scientific advice by Cindy Sage, Co-Editor, BioInitiative Report, 31 July 08. [References.](#))

Editorial: Three-pronged approach to bolster REACH

This month, we have launched separate initiatives aimed at industry, consumers and scientists to build boost strong implementation of the EU chemical legislation known as REACH.

To encourage action by industry, HEAL has worked with a coalition of public interest groups to develop a fuller list of chemicals that can be categorised “Substances of Very High Concern (SVHC)” according to REACH legislation and are currently available on the market in Europe. The aim of making available the REACH SIN (Substitute it Now!) List 1.0 is to encourage companies to make sound substitution decisions ahead of the REACH authorisation process. The List, which was launched on Wednesday 17 September in Brussels, contains almost 300 chemicals. It is called the SIN List 1.0 because subsequent versions with more chemicals will be produced as relevant information about the properties of the chemicals emerge. [Read HEAL related article.](#)

For consumers, HEAL has co-published with Friends of the Earth Europe a consumers' guide to Bisphenol A, one of the most discussed chemicals included in the SIN 1.0 List. Entitled [“Bisphenol A in plastics: is it making us sick?”](#), the publication has practical tips and a guide to reducing exposure, including an explanation of plastics labelling. If you want to learn more about Bisphenol A's health effects, please see two resources: [Blissfully unaware of Bisphenol A](#), published by Friends of the Earth Europe and [Hormone Disruptors and Women's Health: Reasons for Concern published](#) by HEAL partner, the

Collaborative on Health and Environment. This 6-page brochure ([download the trifold](#)) was produced together with Dr. Lou Guillette at the University of Florida and the Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment (at the University of California, San Francisco).

Last, but not least, we are urging scientists to join the [EU Scientific Advisory Structure](#), which provides the European Commission with expert advice on matters related to consumer safety, public health, and the environment. Scientists can sign up to be part of the risk assessment structure of the scientific committees, the pool of advisors, and the database of experts. HEAL welcomes this initiative, which responds in part to some of the comments that HEAL made to the Commission's consultation about the revision of the Scientific Advisory Structure. We are particularly urging anyone involved in low dose and mixtures toxicology to apply. If you decide to do so, please [let us know](#)

Do you share the Health & Environment Alliance's mission and goals? It is now possible for individuals - as well as organisations - who share HEAL's vision of a healthy planet for healthy people to become supporters of HEAL. Read more and apply [on HEAL website](#).

Editorial: Putting our messages direct to policy-makers on chemicals and climate

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) had an excellent opportunity to put our key recommendations direct to European government representatives at an International Public Health Symposium and High Level Meeting of the World Health Organisation in Madrid, 20-24 October 2008. The two events, which are part of the preparation process for the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health planned to take place in Italy next year, attracted over 300 government officials, scientists and researchers, youth representatives, NGOs and industry. HEAL had an opportunity to present work with policy makers that strongly supports calls for stronger implementation of the precautionary principle and to highlight recent research findings on both endocrine disrupting chemicals and neurotoxic chemicals.

At the Symposium, HEAL and the European ECO Forum were also able to call for a stronger role for public interest groups in environment and health research. The focus of the meeting was on how to bridge the gap between science and policy. We recommended that one of the ways was to step up the involvement of public interest groups and non-governmental organisations in all aspects of the research process, including the framing of questions for research endeavours. HEAL showcased examples of how we have been able to highlight emerging issues for research, and how our publications on recent scientific findings are made relevant and accessible to policy makers. Read a report from the Madrid events and watch HEAL video interviews with some of the scientists. Another opportunity to transmit clear messages to policy makers came as a result of a joint environment and health NGO report on the additional benefits to health of a strong EU climate change and energy policy released in October ([download](#)). HEAL forwarded the report directly to Members of the European Parliament who

would vote a few days later on the EU climate change and energy package.

This clear message to policy makers on the health benefits of a strong climate change policy was reported as: « Representatives from the Health and Environment Alliance, Climate Action Network Europe and WWF say the higher target (of 30%) could generate additional health savings of 25 Billion euros each year by 2020.» Indeed, MEPs strengthened the call for EU Member States to aim to achieve a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 ([read HEAL related article](#)).

November - December 2008

Editorial: Changes in environmental policy can bring down cancer rates

Promoting measures to help bring down the high cancer incidence rates in Europe has become a key theme in our work in recent weeks.

In November, HEAL launched its Pesticides and Cancer campaign with the news that an official, quantified relationship has been established between pesticide exposure and cancer. A recent independent impact assessment commissioned by the European Parliament has estimated that approximately 1% of cancer incidence may be due to exposure to hazardous pesticides. Although HEAL and campaign partner MDRGF believe that this is an underestimate, especially for certain reproductive cancers such as breast and testicular, the published estimate represents an important acknowledgment of a causal effect.

The pesticides and cancer campaign aims to provide health-affected groups and individuals with scientific information and useful tools to help them influence the current legislative debate on pesticides. Support for the campaign is already growing rapidly in France, where HEAL coordinator and new staff member, Aurèle Clémencin has brought together a platform of seven organisations including health professional associations, cancer patient organisations and women's groups. You can support the campaign by replying to our one-question poll on the www.pesticidescancer.eu website (in English and French) and by joining us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/pesticidescancer).

The campaign launch took place on the occasion of a reception with Theo Colborn, a foremost scientist on endocrine disruption. Her presentation on "The male predicament" reviewed the effects of endocrine disrupting chemicals on the human male. She concluded that the effects of widely dispersed fossil fuel-derived chemicals could be posing a more imminent threat to the survival of humans than the threat of climate change. Dr Colborn's work on endocrine disruption is world famous. "[Our Stolen Future](#)", the book she co-authored in 1997,

brought the issue to public attention worldwide.

In the near future, the European Commission is likely to form a Cancer Task Force that should take up prevention as part of its work. In preparation, HEAL organised a [workshop](#) following the Annual General Assembly on 2 December to identify strategies for reducing cancer through environmental policy changes. The World Health Organisation recognises the need for national programmes to address occupational and environmental health within a prevention package. Dr Caroline Lucas, Member of the European Parliament reminded the meeting of the Parliament's strong position on cancer prevention. Its Resolution in April 2008 makes six references to prevention and recognises that cancer is caused by multiple factors in multiple stages. She believes that a new prevention paradigm is needed that would address lifestyle, occupational and environmental causes on "an equal footing".

HEAL's AGA (1-2 December 2008) also included the launch of a comic strip called "[Choosing our Future](#)", co-produced with MDRGF and well-known French comic strip artist, David Ratte. The cartoons and supporting text in English and French make the links between chemicals and health and highlight what the EU should be doing to promote a healthier future. Cancer is among the health problems covered. The publication calls for a speeding up of the authorisation process within REACH (EU chemicals policy) to ban known or suspected carcinogens from everyday products as soon as possible. We hope that you will enjoy the comic strip book, available at www.choosingourfuture.eu and please give us your opinion on how well you feel EU policy is performing by completing our online survey in the "Take Action!" section of the website.

Thank you and all our very best wishes for a healthy and successful New Year. As a result of the Annual Assembly, we are also proud to announce our new [Executive Committee composition](#) and [eight new member organisations](#).

Editorial: 2009 will see big changes in EU leadership

With European Parliament elections in June and appointment of new Commissioners, 2009 offers an opportunity to rebuild the EU agenda. In light of the financial crises, business as usual is unthinkable as short-sighted economic goals will only again lead to an ever increasing burden on Europeans' health. Rebuilding Europe needs a focus with a long-term vision promoting cleaner, safer environments for healthier Europeans.

One environmental roadmap for how to do this already exists. The [Green 10](#), a group of environmental organisations working at the European level of which HEAL is a member, has developed its vision for the coming Parliament 2009-2014 ([read the Green 10 document](#)). Our own contribution to promoting this "green" manifesto will call on all political candidates to pledge "yes" to a number of commitments via an electronic campaign. HEAL is seeking assurance that they will put health first in relation to specific policy on chemicals, climate change, children's health and several emerging issues.

Climate change will continue to dominate the political scene this year as leaders and advocates alike prepare for the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December. EU leaders must show leadership in achieving an ambitious post-Kyoto agreement. HEAL's contribution will be putting forward the evidence on the important co-benefits to health of certain policy options and by ensuring that the voices of medical professionals are brought to the debate ([read our report](#)). Stimulated by the World Health Organization

Regional Office for Europe, a climate change and health policy is being developed. The draft plan has the potential to bring together in a single document a consistent, inter-sectoral plan of actions for all 53 countries of the wider WHO European region.

In the wider context, intergovernmental preparations are underway for the next Pan-European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health to be held in Italy in 2010. HEAL will call on EU environment and health ministers to renew their commitments to reducing ill-health and disease by improving environmental conditions, especially taking into consideration the special vulnerability of children and setting quantifiable targets. At a preparatory meeting with government representatives in Luxembourg this month, HEAL and partner ECO-FORUM raised key issues, such as indoor air pollution and the role of accidents on children's health, and called for Ministers' commitments to actions in and around schools and day-care centres ([read HEAL related article](#) and [HEAL editorial on DG SANCO Healthy EU newsletter](#)).

To see HEAL's other environmental health priorities for 2009, see our campaign websites on [chemicals](#), [pesticides](#), [mercury](#) and [air quality](#).

Energy-efficient buildings: A chance to create healthy and eco-friendly indoor environments

The European Union is currently reviewing its legislation to improve the energy efficiency of the building sector. The recast of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) offers a unique opportunity to bring together environment and health objectives, and to generate substantial cost savings. More energy efficient and eco-friendly buildings would help achieve climate change mitigation by reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions. In the current crisis, politicians are also looking to the construction sector to get the economy moving.

HEAL believes that these objectives cannot be pursued to the detriment of public health. It is estimated that people spend over 85% of their time indoors. Therefore, the directive should set the right standards to make our homes, schools and offices not only more energy-efficient but also healthier places in which to live. In 1970s, the energy crisis led to "vacuum packed" housing resulting in serious costs to health due to poor ventilation, dampness and mould, and exposure to harmful fumes.

What is needed this time round are new buildings that are energy efficient and affordable but that are also well-ventilated and with low emissions of hazardous substances. This is scientifically, technically and practically feasible. The World Health Organization is setting guidelines for nine serious pollutants commonly found indoors that can help guide decision-making. HEAL is currently helping WHO collect information on organizations working on damp and mould across Europe (see [related article and questionnaire](#)).

Careful investment in eco-friendly buildings offers immense opportunities. It creates jobs and better housing with policies that help reduce energy consumption and

therefore mitigate climate change. However, the effects on health could be for better or worse. That's why the involvement of the health community in this initiative is so crucial.

Voting for "healthy people and a healthy planet" in the European elections, June 4-7

Would you like to know the position of different candidate European Parliamentarians (MEPs) on promoting health through strong environmental policy? Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) hopes to be able to provide this information to you in time for voting in the June elections.

Candidates will be scored on responses to eight questions. They will be asked to commit on: investing in precautionary environmental health policies; putting children and vulnerable groups first; and, the crucial challenge for health and the health sector of global climate change. A further five questions are about chemicals policy (REACH), air quality standards, nano materials, electromagnetic field technology, and noise. [Download the questionnaire.](#)

The survey provides an opportunity not only to gauge candidate MEP positions but also to inform them of what HEAL believes are key policy opportunities to improve people's environmental health. It will also help identify the most active and supportive and those willing to champion particular health and environmental concerns in the future. For example, one question relates to our recommendation for a stronger climate change package in the lead up to the Copenhagen negotiations in December. An ambitious and visionary EU position on substantial greenhouse emission cuts would bring major health benefits, especially for those with heart and breathing problems through energy policy changes that result in improved air quality.

As the Executive Director of the World Health Organisation Dr Chan stated recently "Health had no say in the policies that led to the financial crisis or made climate change inevitable. But the health sector will bear the brunt of the consequences." HEAL and its members are committed to promoting the democratic process to achieve a healthier

and more sustainable Europe. Making the effort both to vote and to identify in advance which candidates to vote for, can make a major contribution to achieving this vision, which is shared by other environmental groups ([read the Green 10 roadmap](#)).

Approximately 90% of all environmental policy is now created at the European level. Over the next five-year European Parliament, crucial decisions affecting the quality of our health, our lives and the planet will be made. Already on the agenda are climate change, agricultural reform, and the implementation of chemical regulation known as REACH. HEAL and its members are not alone in promoting "quality of life" issues. According to official European surveys, the proportion of Europeans concerned about the state of the environment is almost as high as the percentage worried about the economic situation.

HEAL members and staff have already started asking some candidates the survey questions with the help of the kit. We hope to have scores on candidate MEPs in all 27 countries of the EU to share with you in May. We would welcome your help in this task. Please visit [HEAL related article](#) for background information and/or contact [Monica Guarinoni](#), Deputy Director, for further help.