

Press briefing to accompany press release from World Health Organization pasted below.

International guidelines set on chemical pollutants in indoor air

Brussels, 16 December 2010 - Europeans spend more than 80% of their time indoors where air pollution can more hazardous to health than outdoors. Yet, despite monitoring and regulation of outdoor air pollutants, there were no guidelines on chemical pollutants in indoor air until now.

Yesterday, the World Health Organization released its international WHO indoor air quality guidelines on indoor chemicals.

The Health and Environment Alliance hopes that the new guidelines will prompt further consideration of an overall framework on indoor air pollution. At present, no comprehensive legislation exists on indoor air quality.

Ms Anne Stauffer, Policy Manager, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) welcomed the development as a further push towards a harmonised framework on indoor air quality within the European Union. "Health and environment NGOs, such as the Health and Environment Alliance, have been calling for a Green Paper on indoor air quality for several years now."

Ms Stauffer adds: "A wealth of EU funded research on indoor air quality exists to provide the evidence base on health impacts of different sources of indoor pollution. A Green Paper would help ensure this research is taken up in policy decisions."

Indoor air quality is a particular concern for some of HEAL members, such as allergy and asthma patients' organisations, and for groups representing vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly who are more susceptible to harmful fumes.

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Press release issued by the WHO Regional Office for Europe

First WHO indoor air quality guidelines on indoor chemicals now released

Copenhagen, 15 December 2010 ---- A new volume of the global guidelines for indoor air quality is released today. *WHO* guidelines for indoor air quality: selected pollutants results from the contribution of over 60 international scientists to a project coordinated by WHO Regional Office for Europe and presents for the first time evidence and guidance to protect health globally from the impact of indoor chemicals. The guidelines recommend targets for indoor air quality at which the health risks are significantly reduced and provide a scientific basis for legally enforceable standards in all regions of the world.

Hazardous substances emitted from buildings, construction materials and indoor equipment or due to human activities such as fuel combustion for cooking or heating, lead to a broad range of health problems and may even be fatal. At least 400 deaths are caused annually by indoor carbon monoxide poisoning in the WHO European Region, and up to 14% of lung cancers are attributable to residential radon exposure. Life-long exposure to benzene concentrations as observed in European houses is associated with up to 10 cases of leukaemia per 100 000 people.

"Understanding the hazards of these pollutants is a first step to identify the actions necessary to reduce their adverse impacts on health. If these guidelines are sensibly applied as part of policy development, indoor exposure to air pollutants and related health effects should substantially decline," says Ms Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe. "WHO will continue encouraging the relevant policy developments and the intersectoral collaboration necessary for ensuring access to healthy indoor air for everyone."

The guidelines are targeted at public health professionals involved in preventing the health risks of environmental exposures, as well as at specialists and authorities involved in the design and use of buildings, indoor materials and products. This volume is the second in a series, following the 2009 book on dampness and mould, and anticipates further work to address household fuel combustion.

The nine substances considered in this review are common indoor air pollutants globally and are just a few of the many chemicals encountered in indoor spaces. They were selected for this review based on the existence of their indoor sources, the availability of evidence on their health effects, and their common presence in concentrations of health concern. Based on the accumulated science, experts formulated health risk evaluations and agreed on the guidelines for each of the pollutants (see fact sheet).

Problems of indoor air quality are important health risk factors in low-, middle- and high-income countries. Population groups in residences, day-care centres and retirement homes are particularly vulnerable to indoor air pollution due to their health status or age. The guidelines are intended to address various levels of economic development, cover all relevant population groups, and allow feasible approaches to reducing health risks from exposure to the selected pollutants in various regions of the world.

"Public health awareness of indoor air pollution has lagged behind that of outdoor air pollution. The new guidelines now provide clear reference criteria to reduce the health risks from indoor exposure to air pollutants in all regions of the world and at all levels of economic development," concludes Dr Michal Krzyzanowski, leader of the WHO project to draw up the guidelines.

For more information, please visit the web site of the WHO Regional Office for Europe:

WHO guidelines for indoor air quality: selected pollutants

 (http://www.euro.who.int/ data/assets/pdf_file/0009/128169/e94535.pdf)
 WHO guidelines for indoor air quality: dampness and mould
 (http://www.euro.who.int/___data/assets/pdf_file/0017/43325/E92645.pdf)
 Air quality (http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/environmental-health/air-quality)

Russian, French and German versions of this press release will be available on the WHO Regional Office for Europe web site soon.

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