



WORLD HEALTH DAY, MONDAY 7 APRIL 2008

EU urged to act to lessen health impacts of climate change

Brussels, Monday 7 April, 2008 - Health groups are taking advantage of the occasion of World Health Day to call on the European Union to substantially increase its effort to control global warming. (1)

The Health and Environment Alliance and its members are calling for a minimum 30% cut in domestic greenhouse gas emissions within the European Union by 2020 to reap the health benefits associated with a more ambitious climate policy. (2) (3)

Genon Jensen Executive Director of the Health and Environment Alliance says: *“As public health advocates we have an opportunity to push for stronger climate change policies because these will help us tackle some of our greatest health problems, such as obesity, respiratory, heart and mental disease and accidents.”*

In January 2007, the European Commission proposed a 20% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020 (compared to 1990 levels). The EU climate and energy strategy also supports renewable energy and incentives for increased efficiency and reduced pollution. (4)

Whilst the Health and Environment Alliance welcomes the strategy, it is critical of the 20% emissions reduction target. *“This target is unambitious and inconsistent with the recent Bali agreement under which developed countries are asked to reduce their emissions between 25% and 40% by 2020.”* (5)

To protect health and to avoid irreversible and possibly catastrophic planetary changes, the global temperature increase must be kept below 2°C. The findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) showed that if temperatures rise beyond this limit, the risks of increased ill health, injury, and death from heat waves, floods and droughts increase dramatically.

Europe has warmed by almost 1°C over the past century, and the health effects are already clear. The heat wave during the summer of 2003 resulted in an estimated 70,000 premature deaths. (6)

“The World Health Organization is sounding alarm bells on climate change as a potential public health disaster. An opportunity still exists to prevent global temperatures rising by more than 2°C - and the European Union should take it,” said Genon Jensen.

To highlight examples of climate change projects that produce benefits for health, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and the European REGIONAL Health Authorities (EUREGHA) will jointly launch a “Good Practice” competition today. The awards, which will be presented at the “Climate Change and the Challenges for Public Health: Engaging the Regions” Conference held at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels on the 24 June 2008, will showcase projects that are either preparing for the inevitable challenges to health that climate change will bring or that have both benefited health and reduced carbon footprints. (7)

For further information please contact:-

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Notes for editors:-

1. For more information on climate change and health see the Health and Environment Alliance briefing: Climate Change and Health: "Protecting the most vulnerable"
http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Final_climate_change_brochure.pdf
2. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report, Working Group III Report "Mitigation of Climate Change", Mitigation from a cross-sectoral perspective.
<http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg3/ar4-wg3-chapter11.pdf>
3. This target is in line with green groups CAN Europe, WWF European Policy Office, Greenpeace European Unit, and Friends of the Earth Europe and in line with the European Commission proposal that the EU pursue in the context of international negotiations the objective of 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by developed countries by 2020 (compared to 1990 levels), which the Commission recognises is "necessary to ensure that the world stays within the 2°C limit."
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0002:FIN:EN:PDF>
4. The climate and energy strategy also called for a 20% increase in energy efficiency, 20% share of renewables in overall EU energy consumption and a 10% biofuel component in vehicle fuel by the same date.
5. Conclusions adopted by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol at its resumed fourth session held in Bali, 3–11 December 2007
http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/cop_13/application/pdf/awg_work_p.pdf
6. Report on excess mortality in Europe during summer 2003 (2007) 2003 Heat Wave Project, EU Community Action Programme for Public Health, JM Robine, SL Cheung, S Le Roy, H Van Oyen et F R Herrman http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_projects/2005/action1/docs/action1_2005_a2_15_en.pdf
7. See HEAL website on the Good practice award on climate change and health:
<http://www.env-health.org/climatechangeawards>

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), <http://www.env-health.org> is an international non-governmental organisation advocating environmental protection as a means to improving health and well-being. Member groups and organisations represent health, environment, women, health professionals and others. The group has a diverse membership of more than 50 groups (6 international organisations, 11 European networks and 24 national/local organizations) including non-governmental organisations, professional bodies representative of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, academic institutions and other not-for-profit organisations.