



To: EU Environment Ministers  
Cc: EU Commissioner Janez Potocnik

Brussels, 12 April 2013

**Re: Informal Environment Council: your exchange on air quality and urban environment, 22 April**

Dear Environment Minister,

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), a leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union, urges you to consider the significant benefits for human health and well-being, and for the climate, that can be gained through ambitious EU measures to reduce air pollution.

Despite a long history of legislation, air pollution continues to be a massive public health and environmental problem in Europe.<sup>1</sup> As the recent WHO REVIHAAP review of the science on air pollution demonstrates, there is no reason for local authorities, national governments and EU institutions to step back from efforts to improve air quality – on the contrary.<sup>2</sup> WHO concludes that damaging health effects can occur at lower levels than previously thought, and that a broader range of health effects has to be considered. Air pollution is not only a contributing factor to the burden of respiratory and cardiovascular disease – two of the major chronic diseases in Europe - but is increasingly linked to neurodevelopment and cognitive function impacts, and even diabetes. Most worrying is that children, even before birth, are being harmed from air pollutants. Recent studies show early life exposure to air pollution contributes to higher risks of developing chronic diseases later in life, including lung disease, diabetes and cancer.<sup>3</sup> Air pollution is also a factor for adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Current pollution levels in Europe result in significant human health and economic costs. A recent report "[The unpaid health bill: How coal power plants make us sick](#)" provides the first-ever calculation of the effects of coal-fired power generation on chronic lung disease and some heart conditions. It estimates that air pollution from coal plants costs the EU up to 42.8 billion EUR a year. These findings have been widely covered in European and international media, including Forbes, Le Monde, La Repubblica and the Lancet.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.who.int/topics/global\\_burden\\_of\\_disease/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/global_burden_of_disease/en/)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/environment-and-health/air-quality/activities/evidence-on-health-aspects-of-air-pollution-to-review-eu-policies-the-revihaap-project>

<sup>3</sup> Developmental origins of non-communicable disease: Implications for research and public health:

<http://www.ehjournal.net/content/pdf/1476-069X-11-42.pdf>

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As you will be discussing the future of EU air policies, we urge you to consider the three priorities of the attached position paper from over 60 environmental, health and citizens NGOs from across Europe:

1. Ambitious emission reduction commitments in the revised National Emissions Ceilings (NEC) Directive
2. Sectoral legislation to cut emissions from all major sources
3. Enforcement and strengthening of ambient air quality limit values

HEAL further hopes that you will show support for initiatives that will be beneficial for both air quality and the climate, such as phasing out coal power, ambitious reduction commitments for methane and black carbon, or incentives for active transportation and less meat consumption.

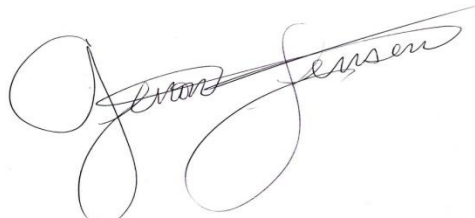
Last but not least: outdoor air pollution is also a major determinant of the quality of the air indoors, and Europeans spend most of their time indoors. We call on you to show your support for improving indoor air quality with a dedicated strategy.

Our extensive and broad alliance of public health, health professional and health-affected groups, as well as women's, environmental and consumer groups from across Europe is keen to support your efforts to reduce air pollution.

We count on your political commitment for tackling what one of our members, the European Respiratory Society calls the "invisible killer" at the Informal Council meeting and in the months to follow, so that substantial and immediate gains for health and the economy can be reaped.

We look forward to future exchanges on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Genon K. Jensen', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Genon K. Jensen  
Executive Director

Attachment:

- [NGO priorities for the review of the Thematic Strategy on Air](#)
- [European Respiratory Society: 10 principles for clean air](#)