



**European Public Health Alliance Environment Network (EEN)
Response to ‘The European Environment & Health Action Plan 2004-2010’
COM (2004) 416 final**

EEN advocates protection of the environment as a means to improving the health and well being for European citizens. Launched in 2004, it represents 3-5 million European citizens and brings together groups that want to ensure that health is at the centre of environment issues. Member groups include NGOs specialising in public health, environment-related health conditions and women’s environmental and health concerns and associations representing health care and environmental professionals.

EEN recognises the potential benefits for society in economic, environment and social terms, if real progress is made in reducing environmentally related health diseases. Over the past year, EEN and its member groups have strongly supported the European Commission’s commitment to making progress on improving our health and environment through the SCALE process and through the new Action Plan on environment and health.

Citizens across Europe expect the EU to exercise global leadership in sustainable development and health protection, and the EU Action Plan on Environment and Health is an ideal opportunity to do so. According to a recent Eurobarometer, 89 percent of citizens are concerned about the effects of the environment on their health. They generally believe that health risks caused by environmental factors have increased considerably over the last 10 years, and that actions from the relevant authorities are inadequate. The EU’s Action Plan could be used to better respond to the public’s interest and concern about how the environment, regulations and personal choices affect our health in the short and long term.

Although EEN welcomes the Action Plan as a general framework in which to address environmental health challenges, EEN is disappointed that the significant contribution by Environment and Health Groups, who act on behalf of the wider public, has been, to a large extent, disregarded. The Action Plan fails to take forward many of the concrete and important proposals of the SCALE Technical Working Groups and Consultative Group.

Key demands for implementing the Action Plan

EEN has several key points that are essential to consider in the implementation of the Action Plan.

- 1. *Legislative action or review is a must for an ACTION plan.***
- 2. *Precautionary decision-making should provide the basis for SCALE.***
- 3. *Protection of vulnerable groups must be at the heart of the Action Plan. This includes improved risk assessment methods that protect vulnerable groups and take into account cocktail effects, low doses and exposure during critical periods of development.***

- 4. The work carried out in the framework of the WHO Environment and Health process, in particular the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan, and the SCALE process must be properly coordinated.**
- 5. A comprehensive communications strategy and information system must be an integral part of the implementation in order to deliver information on environment-linked health risks in response to European citizens demands. This includes strengthening links between information gathering (Actions 1-4) and awareness raising (Actions 9-13).**
- 6. Concrete measures and resources to create an EU coordinating body for environment and health issues.**
- 7. Development of an integrated EU environment and health mapping (geographical) system.**
- 8. Setting up an EU wide biomonitoring programme.**
- 9. Financial resources and targets, which are critical for better environmental health, must underpin the Action Plan.**
- 10. Four priority diseases have been identified for the first cycle (2004-2010), discussions should begin to discuss priority areas for the second cycle by 2006 on the basis of a mid-term report.**

EEN believes that overall EU leadership has not yet delivered what citizens have been asking for in this area, namely that concrete strides are made in reducing environmental pollution that has a negative impact on people's health and ensuring that legislation adequately protects our most vulnerable groups in society such as children, women of child bearing age, pregnant women and socio-economically deprived groups.

EEN realises the tight time schedule and the demanding workload that the Commission was working to in order to present the Action Plan at the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Budapest this June gone. EEN hopes that the Action Plan can now be implemented into concrete measures, guidelines and action that address the reduction of environmental contaminants that undermine our health and the sustainability of our environment.

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