



Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) response to launch of a European framework to address health impacts of climate change, which was published to coincide with the release of the White Paper, Adapting to Climate Change on 1 April 2009.

EU Plan targets health problems related to climate change

Brussels, Thursday 2 April 2009 - The European Commission has published a plan on how the health sector should adapt to climate change. The document was launched in conjunction with the EU's White Paper on Climate Change Adaptation yesterday. (1)

The plan is a staff working document outlining EU plans for tackling all emergency and health-related problems associated with climate change. (2)

It estimates that within just under 20 years an additional 30,000 people may be dying each year as a result of higher temperatures.

Drawing on the Commission's own research findings, the working document says: "In EU countries, it is estimated that mortality increases by 1–4% for each one-degree rise in temperature, meaning that heat related mortality could rise by 30 000 deaths per year by the 2030s and by 50 000 to 110 000 deaths per year by the 2080s." (2)

European Union Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou says the Commission is making the effects of climate change on human health a priority.

"The surveillance of climate change and its effects on human health, emerging diseases and on animal and plant health is amongst the Commission's priorities. We present proposals today which outline how EU policies such as the Health Programme, but also our legislative framework on communicable disease in humans, or our animal or plant health strategies could be mobilised to contribute to adaptation of the health sector to climate change challenges. Making our citizens ready for change through member state planning processes in the public and private sectors, and mobilising our society to protect vulnerable populations are among my main priorities". (3)

Genon Jensen, Executive Director welcomed the coordinated approach taken by the Commission and the focus on protecting vulnerable groups who will be hardest hit, such as asthma sufferers, the elderly and those facing socio-economic difficulties.

"The Communication on health reflects the urgency associated with many of the actions needed today. However, we must rapidly go beyond surveillance to implementing actions to ensure that the EU provides hospitals, clinics, doctors and patients with the tools and examples of good practice they need to make the change happen."

The health sector in Europe is already feeling the effects of climate change. Hospital admissions rose dramatically and 70,000 people died during the heatwave of summer 2003. (2) Emergency services have had to deal with more floods and forest fires, and worsening air pollution. Allergy seasons are starting earlier and ending later and outbreaks of food and vector borne diseases are more common.

"At HEAL, we are urging EU Health Ministers to take seriously not only the need to adapt to these problems but also to organise for action that will substantially reduce carbon dioxide emissions and help prevent additional deaths. Specific policy changes aimed at mitigating climate change can provide enormous benefits for public health (4), and the health sector itself is becoming increasingly engaged in lowering its carbon footprint (5)," says Genon

Jensen.

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1. The press release on the White Paper, Adapting to climate change, 1 April 2009 is available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/519&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>
2. Commission Staff Working Document, Accompanying document to the Communication, Adapting to climate change: Towards a European framework for action Human, Animal and Plant Health Impacts of Climate Change {COM(2009) 147} To receive a copy email Christian Farrar-Hockley, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), Christian@env-health.org (not yet available online).
3. Quote provided on 1 April 2009 following HEAL's direct communication with the Health Commissioner in the preparation of this press release.
4. Report: The co-benefits to health of a strong EU climate change policy, CAN Europe, Health and Environment Alliance, WWF, available at http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits_to_health_report_-september_2008.pdf
5. According to Carbon Trust's Tim Jenkins: "Eighteen more National Health Service (NHS) Trusts from across England and Scotland are set to cut their collective carbon footprints by 60,000 tonnes and energy costs by £7 million per year by joining phase three of the Carbon Trust's NHS Carbon Management (NHS CM) programme. The NHS in England currently emits approximately 3.7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide every year from its buildings alone and must cut this by 15 per cent by 2010 if it is to meet mandatory targets set by the Department of Health." Press release, Carbon Trust helping 48 NHS Trusts cut carbon and save cash, 01 May 2008, <http://www.carbontrust.co.uk/News/presscentre/2008/>

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Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection and sustainability improves health and to empower the health community to contribute their expertise to policy making. Since its inception, HEAL's membership has grown to include a diverse network of more than 50 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organizations across Europe which together have a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debates and the decision-making process. Website: www.env-health.org