

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Dalbokova D

WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, Bonn Office, Germany

Key words: environmental health information system, Central and Eastern Europe, health indicators

Objective: Through series of multinational collaborative projects WHO has developed a methodology for indicator-based assessment and reporting on environmental health situation and relevant policies in Europe. A significant outcome is the baseline assessment of the children's health and the environment with regards to four regional priority goals of CEHAPE (Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe).

Methods: A set of 26 indicators encompasses children's health and most relevant environmental risks of water-borne diseases and unsafe sanitation, injuries, respiratory health and air quality, hazardous chemicals and radiation. They were selected on the basis of policy relevance and scientific reliability, and the availability and accessibility of necessary data. Analyzed were time and space patterns for each indicator and potential health benefits of interventions. The information provided by each of the indicators, along with its scientific basis and policy context, was presented in the form of standardized "fact sheets", accessible on the web site <http://www.enhis.org>. The "baseline assessment" integrates the information providing a first evaluation of the status and trends in the first half of the current decade of the priority environmental health (EH) issues specified by the CEHAPE.

Results: Health-related water problems, fatalities from road traffic accidents, unintentional injuries and infant respiratory disease mortality showed a clear West-East European regional gradient. The lack of harmonized water-borne diseases surveillance hampered the assessment of children's health related to water quality indicators. Outdoor air pollution remains a problem and asthma and allergic symptoms tend to increase throughout the WHO European Region. Environmental tobacco smoke continues to be the most significant indoor air health problem and smoking bans in bars and restaurants is still insufficient. Among the current chemical risks in food, heavy metals and persistent organic compounds cause presently concern in

Europe. Excessive UV radiation is an important risk factor for severe diseases which is largely preventable by simple measure. For several indicators, in particular those related to hazardous chemicals, only surveys limited to selected parts of country population were available restricting possibility for country-wide assessments.

Conclusions: The information on health effects related to the environment, environmental issues affecting children's health, and actions aiming at reduction, or prevention of the health risks enables policy-makers to monitor situation and trends in the countries and evaluate relevant policy effectiveness. Systematic approach to regular indicator reporting can help resolving information and knowledge gaps. Opportunities and challenges, and actions needed to advance the environmental health information system in Central and Eastern Europe will be highlighted. Setting a participatory process involving all relevant parties is essential for system development, strengthening country capacity and information sharing.

Acknowledgements: ENHIS-2 partners http://www.euro.who.int/EHIndicators/Methodology/20060201_2

ENHIS-2 project is supported by the European Commission DG SANCO Grant SPC2004124