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# COPHES: EUROPEAN NETWORK ON HUMAN BIOMONITORING

Human biomonitoring (HBM) is an effective tool to assess human exposure to environmental substances and in some cases their potential health risks. It is seen as an essential element in a strategy for environmental health impact assessment.

In support of the European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010, European scientists and stakeholders from 35 institutions in 27 European countries formed a Consortium to Perform Human Biomonitoring on a European Scale - COPHES, funded by the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013).

They will develop a functional framework allowing the collection of comparable HBM data throughout Europe. Indeed, currently the many studies in EU too often gather fragmented data that do not allow full exploitation. The framework will also include a roadmap for integration of HBM data with environmental and health information and will address ethical aspects specific for the collection and storage of human material and data.

Improved comparability of European HBM data will allow cross boundary evaluation of human exposure and support the elaboration of background levels and guidance values. This will facilitate, for example, the identification of potential high exposure populations or subpopulations and lead to focused research projects.

HBM is an important tool to support environment and health policy making. It allows superior quantification of exposure of the general European population to existing and emerging envi-

ronmental substances. HMB also enables evaluation of policy actions aimed at reducing exposure, more comprehensive health impact assessments of policy options, control of chemical regulations (e.g. REACH), etc.

Starting from an inventory and analysis of similarities and discrepancies in existing and planned HBM studies in different EU Member State, harmonized study protocols will be prepared and tested out from 2011 onwards. Although the focus at this stage is given to methyl mercury, cadmium, phthalates as well as environmental tobacco smoke, further substances will be included in the coordinated approach. Measurements thereof depend, however, on priorities and funding possibilities of Member States.

An extensive training and capacity building programme will also be developed for all European countries who express an interest. Furthermore, an extended communication strategy will target not only the scientific community and the individual participants in studies, but also policymakers, stakeholders and the population at large.

The project is coordinated by BiPRO GmbH, Germany, in close collaboration with the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. It started on 1 December 2009 and is scheduled to run for 3 years. More information will soon be available on the project website: <http://www.eu-humanbiomonitoring.org>.

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