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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT
AND HEALTH COMMITTEE (EEHC)

(Prepared by the EEHC Secretariat in consultation with the UN ECE Secretariat)

This report is submitted in compliance with the requirement set out in paragraph 65 of the Declaration adopted at the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (London, June 1999), to report annually to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Committee on Environmental Policy. It summarizes the work done and the decisions taken by the EEHC since September 2000.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) met in Dublin on 30 November and 1 December 2000 and in Cortona, Italy, on 21 and 22 June 2001.
2. Information on current membership (representatives of countries, intergovernmental/international and nongovernmental organizations and major groups) can be found on the EEHC Web site (www.eehc.dk). The Co-chairpersons are Dr Corrado Clini and Dr Heinz Schreiber, and the Vice-chairperson is Dr Alan Pinter. The next election of country members will be at the September 2002 sessions of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy.
3. A communication strategy was developed for the EEHC, to enable it to act as a forum for information on environment and health in the European Region. The *European Bulletin on Environment and Health* was redesigned and updated, the EEHC Web site (www.eehc.dk) was improved, and press briefings and contacts helped to generate wide press coverage for the WHO-organized meeting on environment and health at the Sixth Session of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP6) and for the meeting of the Signatories of the Protocol on Water and Health in Budapest.

COMMITMENT TO ACTION FOLLOWING THE LONDON CONFERENCE: HIGHLIGHTS

Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

4. The first session of the Meeting of the Signatories to the Protocol took place in Budapest, at the invitation of the Government of Hungary, on 1 and 2 November 2000. This meeting agreed on activities to be carried out under the Protocol pending its entry into force, with UN ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe acting as Secretariat. In view of the status of ratification of the Protocol, its entry into force is expected by the year 2003.
5. The first session of the Working Group on Water and Health, held in Budapest on 14 and 15 May 2001, established an expert group for development of an evidence base and reporting scheme under the Protocol. The group will hold its first meeting in October 2001 at the WHO Collaborating Centre on Water Hygiene in Bonn.
6. Significant efforts have been made to provide governments and the general public with information on the Protocol on Water and Health, through the creation of a dedicated Web site and the production of a booklet.

Transport, environment and health

7. A joint WHO/UN ECE High-level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health, convened in Geneva on 4 May 2001, decided that further preparatory work is needed to be able to decide whether to start negotiations on a Framework Convention on Transport, Environment and Health. This work, including identification of the possible elements that could be covered by such a convention, will be carried out at international level by a tripartite task force to be established within the framework of the processes for follow-up of the London Charter and Vienna Declaration. A second high-level meeting will be convened in 2002 to consider the results of this work.
8. The publication *Transport, environment and health* was issued in printed and electronic versions. Italy confirmed its interest in supporting the development of a clearing house on transport, environment

and health. Two projects submitted by Malta and the International Society of Doctors for the Environment have been endorsed by the Charter Steering Committee as contributing to implementation of the Charter.

Implementing national environmental health action plans (NEHAPs) in partnership

9. A questionnaire survey on the status of implementation of NEHAPs in 25 countries found that most are in the implementation phase. Although the challenge of implementing NEHAPs now lies with countries, there is a need to continue the international collaboration on this issue, led by a task force. The European Commission (EC) expressed interest in using NEHAPs as an instrument in the accession of countries of central and eastern Europe.

Environment and health research

10. The Liaison Group on Environment and Health Research for Europe, jointly established by the EC, the European Science Foundation and WHO, continued to report to the EEHC in preparation for the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. Denmark has expressed its willingness to help organize a meeting on environment and health research. Several projects related to the high-priority research issues identified by the London Conference are under way.

Access to information, public participation and access to justice in environment and health matters

11. Negotiations have begun on a Protocol on Strategic Environment Assessment to the UN ECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. A workshop on public participation, environmental assessment and health assessment in strategic decision-making was held in November 2000 in Szentendre, Hungary, to provide input to those negotiations. Interactive Health Ecology Access Links (IHEAL), a network initiated and run by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in response to the Aarhus Convention and the London Declaration, was further developed.

Health, environment and safety management in enterprises (HESME)

12. Basic criteria for indicators of comprehensive workplace health management were agreed by representatives of ministries of health from 20 countries, the EC and NGOs. Pilot good practice HESME projects started in the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland and Turkey. Joint activities were organized with the EC's public health programme. HESME is currently being actively promoted by four WHO networks: government focal points; WHO collaborating centres in occupational health; the European Insurance Network for Work and Health; and associations of health professionals. Guidance documents are being prepared with these networks.

Children's health and the environment

13. A multisectoral project against children's exposure to tobacco smoke began in Latvia and Poland. A basis for monitoring and reporting on children's environmental health was developed in collaboration with the European Environment Agency. A publication addressing the specific vulnerability of children to environmental hazards and its implications is being finalized. Other ongoing activities include development of a coordinating network, and follow-up of projects in Estonia (injuries) and Italy.

Early human health effects of climate change and stratospheric ozone depletion

14. The project on climate change and adaptation strategies for human health, a three-year project funded by the EC, is being carried out in 25 European countries. A WHO/United Nations Environment Programme/World Meteorological Organization/Health Canada project is developing guidelines to assess the population's vulnerability to climate change. The efficacy and sustainability of health watch/warning systems is being assessed in 52 European cities. Three pilot projects have been initiated on how to monitor the health impacts of the effects of climate change on heat, air pollution and vector- and food-borne diseases.

Economic perspectives on environment and health

15. A project in this area, which is at the interface between health impact assessment and the internalization of health costs, evaluates how the health dimension is valued in various interventions by countries or international organizations. First results are expected by the end of 2001 for the following interventions: school rehabilitation, water quality improvement, malaria control, tobacco advertising, speed limit enforcement and noise control.

RAPID ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENT

16. Industrial accidents leading to major environmental pollution occurred in the early months of 2000 in the lower Danube river basin. To move from remediation to prevention the EEHC, at the invitation of Italy, reviewed and endorsed the development of a methodology for rapid assessment of environment and health risks.

17. The methodology was jointly developed by WHO and the Italian Ministry for the Environment, under the coordination of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, Rome Division, and with the participation of environment and health specialists from Denmark, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovakia and the USA, nominated by the EEHC, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and UN ECE. Field tests were done thanks to the kind collaboration of the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water. The methodology compares favourably to other techniques currently in use in European river basins. The methodology comprises a manual, a software package (on compact disk) and a software manual, all of which can also be downloaded from www.who.it/HT/LowerDanube/danube.htm. This activity is part of the workplan under the Protocol on Water and Health and also provides input into the workplan for the UN ECE Industrial Accidents Convention.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FOURTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

18. The Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health will take place in Budapest in 2004. To assist the WHO Regional Office for Europe in the preparations, and to help ensure wide consultation and input, the EEHC at its June 2001 session accepted the role as steering committee of the Budapest Conference. The EEHC also established a conference working group composed of representatives of Hungary, Italy, the United Kingdom, the EC, UN ECE and the European Public Health Alliance.

19. A questionnaire will be circulated in the summer of 2001 to solicit input from countries on the priority topics and themes that they would like to have considered for inclusion on the agenda of the Budapest Conference. The EEHC has encouraged countries to reply with their comments.

20. A questionnaire will also be circulated by the European Health and Environmental Network (eHEN) to its key NGOs and other major groups, to solicit their input to the Budapest Conference.

21. As requested at the London Conference, the EEHC will present the agenda of the Budapest Conference for approval by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the UN ECE Committee on Environmental Policy at their September 2002 sessions.