

*"We need a real paradigm shift in the way we think about disease prevention, health promotion and the environment. We need an approach that is all-embracing and comprehensive, and one that takes health and health inequality issues into consideration in all environmental policy areas"*

Zsuzsana Jakab, Regional director  
WHO/EURO, Parma March 2010

## A LONG WAY BACK, A LONG WAY FORWARD

Environmental issues have exerted their effects on the health of Europeans for several decades and – over the last two decades – the issues have become increasingly more complex. The link between health and environment has never been so tight as it is today and the need to address these issues is here and now.

## SUCCESSFUL ACTIONS IN THE PAST:

- The ban of **petrol lead** led to a 90% reduction of lead emissions between 1990 and 2003, was accompanied by a significantly lower level of lead in our children's blood;
- The national bans on **indoor smoking** have been found to exert effects on health outcomes already after a few months in the countries where they were introduced

## BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN

The burden of environment-related diseases has been **steadily on the increase**. Some, like asthma and allergies, have enormous social and economic costs, including a significant impact on healthcare systems.

Increasing evidence suggests that environmental issues have an impact on **all health issues**, including cardiovascular diseases and pregnancy outcomes.

*"It is obvious that these challenges should be seen as not only for the European governments .... but for the whole public health community in Europe. EUPHA strongly supports the decisions of the Parma conference and will be a strong advocate of the European Environment and Health Process"*  
Stanislaw Tarkowski, EUPHA  
president 2009-2010

## FOCUS ON THE FOUR QUESTIONS OF THE FUTURE

1. **Global climate change** – the rapid increase in alterations to the environment and ecosystems is a reality. Our understanding and capacity to deal with global climate change should be intensified.
2. **Environmental sustainability** – has become a leading factor in the setting up of policies. Our endeavour to decrease the impact of human beings on the environment should be included in health strategies.
3. **An ecosystem perspective** –our actions should no longer look at one single risk factor and one single effect, but at the interplay of multiple factors on multiple effects, including indirect links. Our goals will have to include not only physical well-being, but also social well-being and mental well-being.
4. **Inequality and environment** – environmental hazards have the intrinsic feature of taking its heaviest toll on the most underprivileged. We should focus on reducing socio-economic and gender inequalities in the exposure to environmental health stressors.



## REMAINS COMMITTED

There is a need for more **research** and more collaborative research. Shifting the focus from evaluating the burden of disease to evaluating the efficacy of policies aimed at reducing them will increase the potential of research to influence decision-making.

In **practice**, bio monitoring and exposure data will need to be integrated in existing reporting systems. There is a clear need for local evidence and exchange of local practice. Urban health needs to further defined and explored.

*"Environment and health is a concern of everyone, and public health professionals in their collaboration with each other, even more"*

Peter van den Hazel,  
President EUPHA section on  
Environment-related  
diseases

In the field of **policy**, there is a need for intersectoral cooperation, where health is better integrated into the agenda of environmental policy. This goal will be reached more easily if we connect the authorities and instruments of health policy and those for environmental

The issue of environment and health should be included in the **training and education** of both public health professionals as well as environmental professionals. Special attention should be given to intersectoral collaboration.