



**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE  
WORKING PARTY ON HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT**

**23 MAY 2006  
LUXEMBOURG**

**1. Adoption of agenda**

Mrs Staatsen welcomed the participants, and the agenda was adopted

**2. Report and actions WP- meeting September**

There were no comments to the minutes from the WP-meeting in September. Mrs Staatsen said that she had raised the question of a scientific secretariat to the WP without getting any feedback. The discussion would be looked at again in the next call for proposals of the Public Health Programme.

**3. Working Party organization (Mrs Brigit Staatsen, National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM))**

Mrs Staatsen stated that the mandate for the WP is accepted as no comments to the proposal were received. She then presented a suggestion for a detailed work plan for the next period, a plan she described as ambitious as long as the WP is not assisted by a scientific secretariat. She emphasized that the Work Plan is still open for discussion, and she urged participants to look at the draft and give input. She also draw the attention of participants to two of the proposed tasks in the Work Plan, one of them regarding discussion and writing of an advisory report on the Environment and Health Information review and implementation plan. The deadline is May 26. The other task dealt with giving advice to the Work Plan of the Public Health Programme 2007, with a final deadline in July.

The WP concluded that there is a need for a scientific secretariat, and that the WP should focus on advising on scientific questions. The working party concluded that there is a need to coordinate its activities with the work in European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) to avoid duplication and overlapping work. It was decided that in addition to the proposed objectives the WP should also disseminate information on research regarding environment and health to policy makers, the general public and other stakeholders. The WP then resolved to arrange back to back meetings with DG Environment and the Consultative Forum meetings in the future.

Mr Farrar-Hockley raised the general question of the need for more information regarding the functioning of the scientific committees organized by DG SANCO. He said that NGOs are concerned with how questions in the scientific committees are asked, and he stressed the need for some parliamentary oversights on this work.

Mr Ryan emphasised that it is not in the interest of SANCO C2 to have twisted questions or replies and proposed to put this question on the agenda for the next meeting. In the meantime, SANCO C2 will contact the head of unit responsible for the SCENHIR committee, to see what procedures, rules and regulations related to the establishment of this group. It was concluded that SANCO C shall inform the working party as soon as possible, and not wait until next meeting.

Mrs Staatsen said the Working Party in the last meeting was asked to bring forward an EU overview on the development of environment and health projects. She then proposed also to link this up to Environment and health action plans (NEHAPS).

Mrs Dalbokova replied that there should be a review and re-evaluation of NEHAPS to better understand what the challenges we are facing are and what follow up actions that should be carried out. She then proposed to flash experiences from a few countries so that the working party could contribute by making this more systematic.

Mr Ryan encouraged the Working Party to expand its horizon. Besides coordinating information and environment projects within the information strand, the party should also try to identify relevant projects in the health determinant strand and invite them along. In connection to this, he also called on the WP to seek out relevant projects that are funded under other Community programs.

Mr Ryan described the ECHI short list and long list. He encouraged the party to pay attention to the long list, since this is the one that is requiring further development. There is an ongoing discussion on which indicators that can be made operational and in what priority order. The WP should give advice to the Member States on which indicators should be developed.

He then commented upon questions raised during the meeting, and didn't exclude the possibility of making an environment and health report, based upon the projects that have been conducted in the Public Health Programme. This report would show information gaps, making links to relevant community policies and give advises in a public health perspective. If the WP considers this as a priority, an opening for funding can be incorporated in the work programme for 2007. It would also be possible to address the need for scientific secretariats by making a reference in the work programme for this priority, as well as establishing web sites for the working party.

## **4. Projects update**

### **4.1. Exposure at UMTS electromagnetic fields: study on potential adverse effects on hearing (EMFnEAR) (Mr Paolo Ravanazzi, Istituto di Ingegneria Biomedica, Italy).**

Mr Ravazzani presented the EMFnEAR project (Exposure at UMTS electromagnetic fields: study on potential adverse effects on hearing)

EMFnEAR is studying the potential health effects of UMTS phones on the hearing system of animals and humans. The objectives are to:

- Assess potential changes in auditory function of animals and humans due to exposure to EMF produced by UMTS phones
- Support informed decision-making by health and environmental authorities and public information
- Provide industry with adequate information for assessing and managing the potential risks of UMTS standard for hearing
- Contribute to the debate on the exposure limits at this modulation and frequency band and, on the Council Recommendation 1999/519/EC.

Mr Tuomisto raised the question on whether this committee should give advice to the Commission on how to prioritize the use of its limited resources: How much priority should be given to new subjects where the knowledge is low compared to subjects where you know that intervention will cause positive effects?

Mr Farrar-Hockley commented upon Mr Tuomisto's suggestion by showing a project run by WHO dealing with the precautionary principle and making it more operational, which could be helpful for the Working Party.

### **4.2. Development of public health indicators for reporting Environmental occupational risks related to agriculture and fishery (DIRERAF) (Mr Dimitrios Kouimintzis, University of Athens).**

Mr Kouimintzis presented the DIRERAF project.

The project attempts to develop a tool for reporting risks and assessing the impact of policies and practices with regards to occupational and environmental health risks for the agricultural and fishery sector in the EU. It also tries to make this harmonized tool available for use in the EU countries. The main point of their methodology is to develop indicators based on already identified health risks that are documented in scientific literature.

Since the last meeting the project has focused on promoting the project and strengthening the network of experts and national officials involved in the field of health and safety in agriculture and fishery. The project has also been mapping Europe with regards to policies and practices for sources and data collection. Finally, effort has been put into enhancing the database of health risks and accidents by production type in agriculture.

The project is a few steps away from its core task of developing indicators for health and safety in agriculture and fishery. They aim to propose a small set of functional and feasible indicators.

Mr Gallo raised the question whether there are any available data in the member states concerning the relation between pesticides consumption or use of pesticides in agriculture and development of human cancer. If not, he wondered whether there are there plans of collecting it.

Mrs Linos replied that she didn't know of ecological studies linking data from tumour registries to pesticide consumption registries. She thought the working party should consider proposing for FP 7 that an ecological study about consumption of specific pesticides and relation to tumours could be carried out. She also said that the project probably will develop one or two indicators related to pesticides consumption.

Mr Pirard urged the Working Party to be cautious with research using ecological studies because in such studies there are a lot of biases that are difficult to control, for example to assess exposure to pesticides. He said that ecological studies can be helpful to suggest hypotheses in order to orientate subsequent research. But it is very difficult to demonstrate a relation in ecological studies.

The working party discussed the relevant legislation on national level and EU level and how this influenced the project. Mrs Linos confirmed that they are collecting data on existing policies in 25 European countries. She underlined that the panel of experts will have an important role in the proposal of indicators, and she thought that both a maximum list and optimal list of indicators would be elaborated before the political decision was made. She did hope that at some point in the future the indicators that will be proposed will develop into legislation. On the other hand she said that it is not likely that they will propose indicators *based on* legislation. A pilot test will be carried out across Europe to assess the efficiency of the proposed set of indicators.

**4.3. Air Pollution and Health: A European Information System. Monitoring the impact of Air Pollution on Public Health in 26 European cities (APHEIS). (Mr Philippe Pirard, Department of Environmental Health - Institut de Veille Sanitaire).**

Mr Pirard presented the APHEIS project.

APHEIS is a European public health surveillance system which monitors the effects of air pollution on public health.

The objective of the project is to translate epidemiological findings into decision-making tools and provide reliable, up-to-date and easy-to-use information on the effects of air pollution on public health. The project also places emphasis on how to disseminate information about air pollution in the best way to meet the needs of their target groups.

The project performs health-impact assessments (HIAs) on short- and long-term effects of air pollution over time. It also delivers periodic reports on the impact of AP on PH at

the city and European levels simultaneously. The first HIA from the project provided a conservative and detailed picture of the impact of air pollution on health in 26 European cities, and showed that air pollution continues to threaten public health in Europe. It was proved that even very small and achievable reductions in air pollution levels have a substantial impact on public health.

Mr Gallo raised the question on whether indoor air quality should be given just as much priority as outdoor air quality, when it comes to questions like political attention, research and funding.

The Working Party agreed that research on indoor air pollution should be strengthened.

The working party discussed the problem with using long term data from the United States to describe the situation in Europe.

Mr Tuomisto thought that in spite of the uncertainties, the estimates on the number of deaths accelerated by air pollution is so big that they are of great importance. He also mentioned the dilemma of politicians being reluctant to address the responsibility of the population causing pollution. He thought that DG SANCO was in a key position to highlight the importance of this issue, and he proposed an extensive communication strategy addressing the users of environmental and health information.

Mrs Dalbokova also addressed the importance of communicating messages in a better way to target groups. She asked the working party to consider looking at the projects funded through the Public Health Programme for the last years within the field of air quality and make a short project file to be published on the web page.

Mr Thelen gave an overview of the work in the ECHIM group and a briefing from the last meeting of the Working Party on European Community Health Indicators.

The scientific secretariat is about to produce country reports and to compile the data for the member states concerning the ECHI short list indicators. The secretariat will also go into a communication process with the Member States representatives that have been appointed for the Working Party on European Community Health Indicators and try to identify data gaps or better data sources. An important objective is to make the ECHI indicators operational in the Member States.

The Working Party on European Community Health Indicators also discussed the further development of the ECHI shortlist. No indicators dealing with health and environment are on the short list, but several are on the long list (waiting list). The National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) in Holland has put forward a proposal on how to further develop the ECHI shortlist. The Member States representatives in the Working Party on European Community Health Indicators are considering whether to adopt this proposal or not.

All the Working Parties will be asked again to comment upon the specific proposals that they have made. Additionally, they will also be asked for methodological aspects, possible data sources and possibly updates on e.g. indicator definitions. After the

summer, a questionnaire will be distributed to the chairs of the working parties in order to make statements about these questions. The Working Party on Health and Environment will give a response as soon as this is distributed.

## **5. Presentation of the Community Public Health Programme (Mr John Ryan, DG Health and Consumer Protection, the Health Information Unit).**

Mr Ryan gave an overview of the current (2003 – 2008) and new public health program (2007 – 2014).

The process of drafting the work programme for the Public Health Programme for 2007 is just beginning, and this will be published in the beginning of next year. All Working Parties will be asked to submit ideas for the next years work plan before August. The Health Information Unit is especially interested in finding gaps that are not covered by other organizations or research programs.

Eurostat has been consulting internally within the Commission on a draft regulation on health statistics. This will for the first time put the collection of health statistics on a formal legal basis. Now, most of the statistics collected by Eurostat are collected on a voluntarily basis. This is a framework regulation and doesn't propose anything immediately. The idea is to have a step by step approach so that Member States will only be obliged to do what they are doing at the moment. The ECHI process is the basis for Eurostat's data collection. If the regulation is adopted, after discussion in the European Parliament and the Council, this can be a significant contribution in developing a sustainable and permanent health monitoring system. Eurostat will then start negotiating with the Member States to collect data required for these indicators.

Finally, Mr Ryan encouraged the participants to have a look at the recently launched EU Health Portal to see if there are any gaps regarding health and environment.

## **6. Developments on Environment and Health Information Systems (EHIS) across Europe**

### **6.1. Outline of the Midterm-review report on EHIS by WHO (Mrs Dafina Dalbokova, WHO Bonn).**

Mrs Dafina Dalbokova presented the project coordinated by WHO Europe, "Environment and health information system" (ENHIS 2).

The WHO/Europe project on environment and health information aims to establish a harmonized and evidence-based system to support public health and environmental policies in Europe.

The system enables:

- monitoring the environment and health situation and its trends in the countries and evaluating the effectiveness of relevant policies
- making comparisons between the countries

- regular reporting on environment and health
- exchanging information, data and knowledge as well as good practice examples.

ENHIS-2 started with the aim to put in operation a set of environment and health indicators both for children's health and for the general population's health. The project was also aiming at establishing health impact assessment methods on indoor air pollution and noise and an inventory of current environment and health policies and interventions. An assessment report on children's environment and health and relevant policies is being elaborated and is expected in March 2007. By May the same year, the project is supposed to launch a web service that will present relevant information and up to date analyses. That work will provide input for the mid-term review report.

The Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE) is a document for policy makers addressing the environmental risk factors that most affect the health of European children. This action plan highlights the main commitments on children's health and environment and focuses on four regional priority goals (RPGs) for Europe: RPG I: ensure safe water and adequate sanitation. RPG II: ensure protection from injuries and adequate physical activity. RPG III: ensure clean outdoor and indoor air. RPG IV: aim at chemical-free environments.

An overall structure of indicator-based assessment per Regional Priority Goal is being elaborated.

Mrs Dalbokova challenged the WP on giving input to the implementation of structure on

- EH indicators analysis & assessment
- Case studies to feed in indicators
- Reviewing the assessment report
- Evaluating the web service – user's perspective

Mr Ryan thought the group should give an opinion when the project delivers its reports on the list of indicators for monitoring environment and health. Perhaps one also should also present the work for the Working Party on European Community Health Indicators to get a second opinion on the indicator list. He then suggested that perhaps the ECHIM secretariat could be helpful by finding some volunteers that could give an outside comment on the work.

The working party agreed to looking into the indicator assessment within the next 6 months, and reporting back on any case studies that may be relevant for the ENHIS-2 project.

Any members of the working party interested in reviewing the assessment report or helping out in evaluating the web service, were encouraged to give a response to either Mrs Dalbokova or Mrs Staatsen.

The NGO Community will also be invited to take part in the user group of ENHIS and an invitation will be distributed.

Mrs Zurlyte and Mr Gallo briefed the Working Party on the outcome of the meeting in the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) that took place 15-16 May. The meeting focussed on implementation of the regional priority goal II (CEHAPE - Budapest conference) addressing the health consequences of accident and injuries and lack of physical activity. The EEHC asked SANCO to explore the possibility to host a youth meeting on health and environment, and this will probably be held in Luxembourg or Brussels at the end of 2006. The mid-term review intergovernmental meeting has been scheduled in June 2007. Among other things, the environment and health information system was debated, and it was also discussed how the ENHIS 2 project could be expanded to other countries.

## **6.2. Update on the environment and health action plan (Mrs Brigit Staatsen, National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM))**

The working party discussed whether the European Action Plan on Health and Environment (2004 – 2010) was meant to propose concrete actions or simply provide the basis for actions initiated elsewhere. Although not everyone agreed on this, the working party concluded that the action plan must be more action orientated and focus on what precautionary actions should be taken. The majority of the working party felt that there was no balance between the proposed research activities and the concrete proposal for actions. Several of the participants praised the draft for being much improved since previous versions.

Mrs Staatsen felt that two main points were missing in the latest review on the Environment and Health Action Plan. First of all she would like an overall clarification/task on who is going to manage the implementation of the plan and also follow up its progress. It would be natural that DG Environment would be responsible, she said. She also didn't see a very clear task in the area of information systems. She would like some kind of integrated task where one could look at how the systems that are being developed now can be linked together and made accessible for European citizens.

Mr Ryan replied that he thought a single system would be very ambitious and unrealistic, because it is supposed to cover many diverse policy areas. It would be more realistic talking about modules within a single system. He suggested that one could compare the different information systems in order to identify the best ones. The EU Health Portal could then almost be a cost free solution to make this information more comprehensively available, he said.

Mrs Jarosinska stressed the need for making existing information systems within health and environment interoperable, as a single comprehensive system doesn't seem feasible. She also wanted more focus on actions, referring to point 3.3 "Combined exposures to multiple stressors". She questioned if it was really necessary to await for conclusions from research before suggesting concrete policy measures.

Mr Farrar-Hockley said that previous technical working groups had proposed definitive actions, in particular many precautionary that should have been taken. Some of these documents are in fact very good and can still provide good ideas, he said. But he also



pointed out that this action plan was controversial, since several Members of Parliament felt that the document directed them too much.

He also said that it is necessary to make sure that the Austrian paper that will be discussed in June by the presidents and prime ministers will focus on the European Action Plan on Environment and Health 2004-2010 (and not on CEHAPE alone).

He then asked if the European Action Plan can be the basis for how decisions are taken, while CEHAPE can be “the action bit”. The CEHAPE is much more action orientated, he said. He questioned whether it would be better for Member States if they could pick and choose from CEHAPE instead of being forced the suggestions from the action plan.

Mr Ryan encouraged the Working Party to focus on and give comments to the public health aspects that may be lacking. As examples, he mentioned proposals for public health actions and in particular actions on the preventive side.

Mrs Staatsen will prepare a response to DG Environment based upon the discussion in the Working Party. Before sending it to DG Environment, she will distribute her proposal to the Working Party for further comments. The Working Party will try to propose concrete actions.

## **7. Update on EMF (Mr Artur Furtado, DG Health and Consumer Protection, the Health Information Unit).**

Mr Furtado gave an update on the work on Electro Magnetic Fields (EMF). He presented the work on The Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCENIHR) which is a group of independent experts. The committee tries to identify emerging issues from anticipated changes. One of the main tasks is to get information from the already existent data sources: some of them can be somewhat reluctant to share. Confidentiality and the peer-review process are major issues in this regard.

No major public health risks have emerged from two decades of EMF research but some uncertainties remain. Therefore it is important to ensure that the deployment of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology respects the limitations of exposure of the public to Electromagnetic Fields (EMF). There are still considerable uncertainties within the field of EMF and RFID for research to address, and new technologies and devices are constantly being developed. Therefore additional action must be taken.

Increasing risk literacy should also be a priority, as well as developing indicators related to EMF monitoring.

It is expected that RFID will be a bigger concern for public in the future.

Mr Furtado also gave an overview of the present recommendations, a system of basic restrictions and reference levels for overall public exposure. It is the Member States responsibility to ensure that adequate health protection measures are taken. The Commission has on the other hand given several recommendations at Community level. European standards for emissions from radio telecommunications and other low voltage

devices have also been implemented. Workplace emissions are also covered by a 2004 Directive.

Member States have been requested to report to the Commission on national guidelines and measures taken. These legislative measures were published in an implementation report of 2002 that will now be updated and include information for the ten most recent Member States. A new report is being prepared. The questionnaire is being worked out at the moment, and the report is expected to be ready in 2007.

The Eurobarometer was presented as a possible tool for getting more information about the opinion of the European citizens on EMF.

#### **8. Open topics and research needs to be addressed in 2007 (Mr Artur Furtado, DG Health and Consumer Protection and Tuomo Karjalainen, DG Research)**

Mr Karjalainen presented the Framework Programme and research aspects concerning the implementation of the Environment and Health Action Plan, while Mr Furtado presented the draft priorities for the Public Health Programme Work Plan 2007.

Mr Furtado will within a week make a brief summary of the input given by the Working Party to the two presentations for further comments.

DG RTD will supply the WP with an overview of related funded projects in FP 5 and FP 6.

The working party did not discuss emerging issues that need more research. The participants of the Working Party were encouraged to pay attention to this topic at home and report back to either Mr Furtado or Mrs Staatsen.