



ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS

including air pollution in urban settings

ISSUES: Premature death and illness due to major environmental risk factors account for one fifth of the disease burden in developing countries. In countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, this proportion ranges from 19% to 25%. The environmental determinants of health are not being adequately addressed by the public health systems in the Region. Rapid changes in lifestyle, increasing urbanization, energy production and consumption, increasing use of chemicals and climate change are resulting in vast adverse consequences to public health and in rising health costs. Annual health costs due to environmental degradation are estimated to be 1.8% to 3.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) in some countries of the Region.

In addition to these emerging hazards, the Region is still struggling with traditional environmental health problems, such as drinking-water contamination; inefficient management of wastewater and solid and hazardous waste, including health care waste; occupational exposure; indoor and ambient air pollution; inadequate environmental health policies and lack of public awareness. The arid nature of the Region also poses special challenges, such as water scarcity, extreme temperature changes and seasonal dust storms, all of which are expected to increase with climate change, directly or indirectly affecting health security.

SOLUTIONS: There is an urgent need to strengthen national technical capabilities and capacities for the management (prevention, abatement and control) of environmental risks to health. This could be achieved by integrating and advancing the central role of health in decision-making and programmes on matters of environment and development; fostering partnerships between health and related sectors; improving regional and national environmental health information systems; promoting and emphasizing the role of women in environmental

health; increasing environmental health awareness; improving technical capabilities for the monitoring and assessment of environmental risks to health and to vulnerable populations (children, women, elderly); promoting institutional and sectoral capacities to develop policies, legislation and action plans for environmental health; assisting countries in raising additional resources (experts and funds) from donors and international organizations for planning and implementing their environmental health strategies and national plans.

ACTIONS DURING 2010: Support will be provided to countries for the Global Annual Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLASS). The activities around World Health Day 2010 provide an opportunity to focus on upgrading drinking-water quality management systems in the countries of the Region through intersectoral collaboration, development of city water safety plans, evidence building and sharing experiences among city planners. During 2010, WHO will continue to support health care waste management planning and projects, assessment of indoor and outdoor air pollution, evaluation of occupational health risks at the workplace, promotion of healthy environments for children, development of tools and methods for critical environmental health risk assessment and management practices, and formulation of tools, guidance, information and training for climate change.

THE WAY FORWARD: The World Health Day 2010 campaign is an excellent opportunity to galvanize the multisectoral action needed to improve sustainable social and economic development in the Region. Technical support, resource mobilization and capacity building in countries will continue in support of regional and national commitments to addressing climate change and health.



World Health Day 2010
Urbanization and Health



World Health
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