



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

# MEETING OF INTERESTED PARTIES

GENEVA, 18 TO 29 JUNE 2001

---

## Area of work: health and environment

### Progress report 2000

#### BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

1. In the area of “Health and Environment” WHO assumed responsibilities for advocating, promoting, coordinating and carrying out international work in health and environment including the development and promotion of evidence-based guidelines; monitoring and assessment of environmental quality, environmental and health impact assessment; promoting and supporting national capacity building in environmental health; and providing advice, guidance and technical assistance to Member States. The WHO mandate comprises actions at global, regional and country levels concerning environmental management and health protection from environmental hazards.
2. Specific activities address: the environment and health evidence base and normative function (assessment of physical, chemical and biological health risks); assessing global and regional status and trends; identifying and promoting good practice in health risk management (including evidence for the effectiveness of technical, strategic and policy interventions); and providing support to Member States in national and local capacity development and implementation in specific settings including support to international legal and regulatory initiatives and agreements.

#### WATER, SANITATION AND HEALTH

3. Activities undertaken in water, sanitation and health were critically reviewed and substantially reoriented in 1998-1999. The review placed renewed emphasis on evidence base, health focus, unique WHO added value, and partnerships (both internal WHO-wide and external). Year 2000 saw continued implementation of changes and initial fruits of new priorities.
4. Highlights of the year included the launch of the Global Water Supply and Sanitation Assessment 2000 as a joint product with UNICEF (JMP 2000) and launched at the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council’s Global Forum in November 2000.

5. Underpinning work on development of the evidence base included preparation of reports on methodological issues in cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis; approaches to guidelines derivation for microbial hazards in water, and on microbial hazard characterization (with Food safety). Significant efforts were placed behind work in cooperation with Evidence and information for policy on estimation of disease burden associated with water and sanitation.

6. The Water, Sanitation and Health work plan is structured around the core functions of the Organization discussed in the following paragraphs.

7. Normative **guidelines** and regulatory instruments continue to be in demand. Comprehensive plans were prepared for the updating of the Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality with participation of five regional offices and all regional offices actively participating in follow up in at least one area. Updating of Guidelines for Safe Use of Wastewater and Excreta was initiated. Draft Guidelines related to swimming pools and spas were released for public domain comment and a text on monitoring bathing waters published. Strategy towards updating Guidelines on Vessel Sanitation was agreed with Communicable Diseases including cooperation with the Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

8. The focus of activities relating to **global monitoring** of status and trends was the preparation of JMP 2000 which has attracted considerable positive coverage in the press and professional media. Internal review has identified areas in need of improvement and further development and these are now being actively pursued.

9. In relation to **policy** development and dissemination, major activities included preparation of materials on dams and human health which were both published and submitted to the World Commission on dams and taken into account in their deliberations. Within the United Nations system the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources recognized JMP as the United Nations system data source for input to the World Water Development Report and WHO Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality as the United Nations system position on drinking water quality. Support on environmental aspects of malaria control was provided to Roll Back Malaria and for reduction of reliance on DDT in the context of international strategies towards the phasing out of persistent organic pollutants.

10. Tools and support for **technical cooperation**. Considerable efforts were placed in support of WHO's interagency leadership role in developing state-of-the-art position on arsenic in drinking water. With the Regional Office for South-East Asia and the WHO Representative, Bangladesh efforts to increase real support to this problem in Bangladesh began to give fruit with the United Nations Foundation announcing significant support to a joint UNICEF-WHO proposal. Progress was made in development of positions or resources concerning health in impact assessment (interregional consensus building), water and sanitation in emergencies (with the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNHCR) and "Healthy Villages" (with the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean).

11. In order to maximize impact of activities, renewed emphasis has been placed on improving dissemination and awareness of WHO products. Most products are now available on www. New information materials were deployed at around eight major conferences/events during the year.

## **OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

12. The major focus has been the development of activities addressing regional initiatives on **occupational health**, with initial activities in the African Region. The project has begun addressing

occupational health in small-scale industries and in the informal sector, and related components of “Practical Solutions”, and workplace health promotion. Cooperation has been established between WHO and ILO at country and regional levels, as well as between the Regional Office for Africa and headquarters, in implementing city projects in occupational health in small industries in five African cities, which have training, awareness-raising and information dissemination components. One output of the African Initiative has been a revised version of the document “Occupational Health in Small-Scale Enterprises in the Informal Sector: A Document for Decision-Makers”, which is now being edited prior to publication.

13. In parallel, activities under Workplace Health Promotion are supporting the development of local and national healthy workplace initiatives and networks, and in collaboration with other WHO programmes, workplace programmes on tobacco control, AIDS and other priority issues are being developed. Action is being taken to strengthen the training in health advocacy for occupational health and safety staff through preparation of training materials and networking activities. Web site development is taking place in headquarters, and also in web sites maintained by the WHO Network of Collaborating Centres for Occupational Health, and key partners including the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Bilbao, Spain, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, United States of America, and ILO.

14. An expert meeting was prepared and convened to draft the new WHO strategy on **Air Quality and Health**. Several core reports were published in 2000, including Guidelines for Air Quality (WHO/SDE/OEH/00.2) and Guidelines for Community Noise (ISBN 9971-88-770-3). Other reports include Health guidelines for vegetation fire events, Executive summary (WHO/SDE/OEH/00.5), Executive summary of the WHO Guidelines for Community Noise (WHO/SDE/OEH/00.6), Report of the Meeting of the WHO Steering Committee on the Health Guidelines for Biological Agents in the Indoor Environment (WHO/SDE/OEH/00.7).

15. Efforts were focused on further development of the following activities: (1) Evaluation of the health risks of low doses of **ionizing radiation**. This resulted in the preparation for publication of a WHO monograph on the health effects of the Chernobyl accident in clean-up workers. (2) Medical monitoring of the population residing in territories contaminated by radionuclides. The main outcomes of this activity were as follows: the finalization of the preparatory work for the establishment of thyroid cancer tissue, nucleic acids and relevant data banks in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, countries which were mostly affected by the Chernobyl accident, and transition to collecting biological samples. (3) Further perfection of infrastructure and functions of a Network of WHO Collaborating Centres on Radiation Emergency Medical Preparedness and Assistance (REMPAN). The 8th REMPAN meeting was organized and held in the United Kingdom in June 2000. In cooperation with IAEA, requirements and training materials on medical aspects of radiation emergency management have been developing.

16. **International electromagnetic fields (EMF) project:** Activities included the publication of several fact sheets and background reports on Electromagnetic Fields and Public Health. Participation in several international meetings has allowed the EMF research agenda to be modified so as to highlight current gaps in international research programmes.

17. **Intersun Global Ultraviolet (UV) project:** The Global UV Index, a joint recommendation of WHO, WMO, UNEP and the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection, has been in use since 1995. The first major revision of this index took place in December 2000. The meeting highlighted differences in presentations in national programmes and subsequently reached an international

consensus on the characteristics and application of a revised Global Solar UV Index (the revised publication is expected in mid-2001).

## PROMOTION OF CHEMICAL SAFETY

18. **Environmental Health Criteria monographs (EHCs):** Five EHC Task/Working Group Meetings were convened, six EHC monographs were printed (EHC 214-219) and a further five have been edited or are in press. In addition, the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) Guidelines for the monitoring of genotoxic effects of carcinogens in humans were published. **Concise International Chemical Assessment Documents (CICADs):** The 7th CICAD Final Review Board meeting was held where six additional CICADs were discussed, of which five were approved. Nine CICADs have been published or are in press (CICADs 20-28). The IPCS Risk Assessment Steering Group held two meetings and three teleconferences.

19. **Harmonization of Approaches to the Assessment of Risk from Exposure to Chemicals:** An extension of the cancer mode of action framework to address human relevance was initiated. A workshop was convened to address the issues associated with the incorporation of uncertainty and variability in risk assessment. Activities on exposure assessment focused on terminology and model characterization and application. **Endocrine Disruptors (EDCs):** Three IPCS Steering Group Meetings on EDCs were convened as well as a meeting of 20 authors to outline and begin preparation of a draft assessment document dealing with the state-of-the-science of endocrine disruptors. A global inventory of research EDC-related activities was compiled and placed on-line.

20. Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR): the 54th and 55th meetings of JECFA were held. Reports of the 51st (WHO Technical Report Series, No. 891), 52nd (WHO Technical Report Series, No. 893), and 53rd (WHO Technical Report Series, No. 896) meetings of JECFA were published. The following were also published: *Toxicological evaluation of certain veterinary drug residues in food* prepared at the 52nd meeting of JECFA (WHO Food Additives Series, No. 43), *Safety evaluation of certain food additives and contaminants* prepared at the 53rd meeting of JECFA (WHO Food Additives Series, No. 44), and *Toxicological evaluation of certain veterinary drug residues in food* prepared at the 54th meeting of JECFA (WHO Food Additives Series, No. 45). The 2000 JMPR was held and the report of the 1999 JMPR (FAO Plant Production and Protection Paper, No. 153) was published.

21. The 12th Meeting of the Working Group for Poisons Centres was held, attended by 81 participants from 48 countries, with the launch of version 4.0 of the **INTOX System** which allows multinational collection of precisely-defined harmonized human toxicology data, for clinical and risk assessment purposes. The **INTOX Database** now contains over 400 peer-reviewed Poisons Information Monographs. A **pesticide epidemiology project** was initiated to estimate the extent of human exposure and poisoning in selected regions/countries, with a view to implementing preventive and education strategies to reduce morbidity and mortality from pesticide poisoning.

= = =