

What is the EPA Aging Initiative?

The Aging Initiative is helping the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) focus its efforts to protect the health of older persons. A major goal of the Aging Initiative is the development of a National Agenda for the Environment and the Aging. The Agenda will prioritize environmental health hazards that affect older persons, examine the impact that a growing aging population will have on the environment in a smart growth context, and encourage civic involvement among older persons in their own communities to reduce hazards. The National Agenda for the Environment and the Aging will help guide the Agency's efforts to protect the health of older persons.

Why is EPA focusing efforts on older Americans?

EPA is focusing on the health of older persons for the following reasons:

- The United States is undergoing a demographic transformation. In 2006, the first of the baby boomers will begin to turn 60. By 2030, the number of older persons is expected to double to more than 70 million. The 85+ population is the fastest growing age group.
- Our bodies may become more susceptible to environmental hazards as we age. The immune system diminishes with increasing age in most people. In addition, the immune system response is often reduced because older persons are often on multiple medications to treat chronic condition that can make them more susceptible to environmental toxins.
- As we age, we have accumulated a lifetime of exposures from the workplace and our environment that persist in our bodies.

What are some of the environmental hazards that may especially affect the health of older Americans?

- **Indoor air pollutants** -- radon, second-hand smoke, and carbon monoxide
- **Outdoor air pollutants** -- ozone, lead and particulate matter
- **Drinking water contaminants** --microbes, disinfectants and byproducts, and VOCs
- **Pesticides** – the health effects depend on the type of pesticide
- **Heavy metals** - lead and mercury (primarily from coal-fired plants)
- **Temperature extremes**

How can we create a National Agenda on the Environment and the Aging?

The National Agenda for the Environment and the Aging is being developed through a public participatory process. It is based on ongoing work within EPA, comments received from public listening sessions, findings from a National Academy of Sciences workshop, "The Differential Susceptibility of Older Persons to Environmental Hazards," and collaboration with federal, state, academic, research, aging, health and environmental organizations. A draft National Agenda will be released for comment in February 2004. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/aging.