



Children's Health and the Environment in North America: A First Report on Available Indicators and Measures

October 2005

Introduction

With the forthcoming publication of *Children's Health and the Environment in North America: A First Report on Available Indicators and Measures*, North America is on track to be the first region in the world to publish a set of indicators of children's health and the environment. The goal of this new report is to provide decision-makers and the public with periodic, understandable information on the status of key parameters related to children's health and the environment as a means of measuring and promoting change. The report also marks an initial step toward the goal of improving reporting over time through trilateral collaboration.

The CEC is working in partnership with the International Joint Commission's Health Professionals Task Force (IJC HPTF), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and with the active collaboration of the Governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States to compile the report. Slated for release in Fall 2005, the report will fulfill commitments made by the three governments through the CEC's *Cooperative Agenda for Children's Health and the Environment in North America*. It also represents an essential contribution to the Global Initiative on Children's Environmental Health Indicators launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002) and led by WHO.¹

Background

Initial direction for the present indicators initiative came from the CEC Council in its adoption of the CEC's *Cooperative Agenda for Children's Health and the Environment in North America* in June 2002.² The *Cooperative Agenda* calls for the development of North American indicators of children's health and the environment. A feasibility study was subsequently commissioned by the CEC Secretariat and reviewed by a Steering Group comprised of environment and health officials from the three countries and representatives of the partner institutions. The Steering Group subsequently issued a set of recommendations identifying specific indicators taking into account their relevance as well as availability of data in the three countries. The Steering Group also recommended that a flexible approach be taken to enable countries to report related information if they are not able to present information on any of the recommended indicators. The purpose is not to rank or compare countries' performance, but rather to stimulate positive change and improve continent-wide data comparability over time.

In June 2003, the CEC Council endorsed a list of recommended indicators and directed the CEC Secretariat, with the involvement of the Parties and in continued partnership with the IJC, PAHO and WHO, to prepare a first report.³ The Council resolved to continuously improve the quality and comparability of the indicators and data across North America, and to publish subsequent reports on a periodic basis.

Following nearly a year and a half of intense work by the Steering Group and a two-staged review by a panel of nine experts, the first report is near completion. A draft for public comment was released in September 2005 and is available at: http://www.cec.org/pubs_docs/documents/index.cfm?varlan=english&ID=1813. The final report is to be published in fall 2005.

Overview of the Report

The report is composed of two volumes: the North American report and a compilation of the three country reports, which were prepared by the countries and served as the source of the indicators contained in the North American report.

1. For more information on the WHO initiative, please see <www.who.int/ceh/indicators/> or e-mail <cehindicators@who.int>.
2. The CEC Council is comprised of the top-ranking environment officials from Canada, Mexico and the United States. The *Cooperative Agenda* and Council Resolution 02-06, through which the *Cooperative Agenda* was adopted, can be found at <www.cec.org>.
3. Council Resolution 03-10, available at <www.cec.org>.

In partnership with



Following is the list of indicators to be included in the first North American report. They fall into three general areas: asthma and respiratory disease, the effects of lead and other toxics (including pesticides), and waterborne

disease. These coincide with the priority areas established by the CEC Council when it adopted the North American *Cooperative Agenda*. The current list includes 13 indicators, organized under 11 thematic headings.

North American Indicators for Children’s Health and the Environment, by Issue Area

Asthma and Respiratory Disease

ISSUE AREA	INDICATOR	PURPOSE OF INDICATOR
Outdoor Air Pollution	Percent of children living in areas where air pollution levels exceed relevant air quality standards.	To provide information on children’s potential exposures to outdoor air pollution, with a focus on common air contaminants.
Indoor Air Pollution	Measure of children exposed to environmental tobacco smoke (Canada, United States); Measure of children exposed to emissions from the burning of biomass fuels (Mexico).	To provide information on children’s potential exposures to indoor air pollution, with a focus on environmental tobacco smoke and emissions from the burning of biomass fuels.
Asthma	Prevalence of asthma in children.	To track asthma in children.

Effects of Exposure to Lead and Other Toxic Substances

ISSUE AREA	INDICATOR	PURPOSE OF INDICATOR
Blood Lead Levels	Body burden measurements for lead in children.	To provide information on children’s exposure to lead
Lead in the Home	Children living in homes with a potential source of lead.	To provide information on children’s potential exposure to sources of lead in the home.
Industrial Releases of Lead	Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) data on industrial releases of lead.	To provide information on industrial releases of lead.
Industrial Releases of Selected Chemicals	PRTR data on industrial releases of 155 chemicals.	To provide information on industrial releases of selected chemicals.
Pesticides	Pesticide residues on foods.	To provide information on children’s potential exposure to pesticides.

Waterborne Disease

ISSUE AREA	INDICATOR	PURPOSE OF INDICATOR
Drinking Water	(a) Percentage of children (households) without access to treated water. (b) Percentage of children living in areas served by public water systems in violation of local standards.	To provide information on the percentage of children potentially exposed to contaminants and pathogens in drinking water.
Sanitation	Percentages of children (households) that are not served with sanitary sewers.	To provide information on the percentage of children who are potentially exposed to untreated sewage in their immediate surroundings.
Waterborne Disease	(a) Morbidity: number of childhood illnesses attributed to waterborne disease. (b) Mortality: number of child deaths attributed to waterborne disease.	To provide information on children who have been sick from, or have died as a result of, waterborne disease.

For More Information

An extended version of this project description is available on the CEC website at <www.cec.org/children>. It includes listings of the Steering Group members and the panel of experts, as well as a timeline outlining the report’s development.



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