

CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROTECTION POLICY



Karen Hopfl-Harris
Legislative Director/Staff Attorney
Environment & Health Program
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Washington DC, USA



The Environment and Children's Health: The global problem

- Nearly 5 million children die each year from acute respiratory diseases linked to air pollution.
- More than 3 million children die each year from waterborne diseases.



Health and Environment

- Almost one third of the global burden of disease can be attributed to environmental risk factors, over 40% of this burden falls on children under 5 years of age
- Poor environmental quality is responsible for 25 percent of all preventable ill-health in the world today
- 2/3 of all preventable ill-health due to environmental concerns occurs in children



Human Diseases on the Rise

- ***Asthma:*** Kills 180,000/year worldwide and affects 150 million more children and adults
- ***Diabetes:*** Will affect 300 million people worldwide by 2025
- ***Lead poisoning:*** Affects tens of millions of children and adults worldwide
- ***Pesticide poisoning:*** Kills some 40,000 agricultural workers/year worldwide, and affects the health of between 2 million and 5 million more



Chronic Diseases Globally

According to WHO:


- Chronic diseases, including asthma, cancer, diabetes, birth defects, account for 43% of the global disease burden today
- 60% by 2020
- 73% of all deaths by 2020



Global Cancer Rates on the Rise

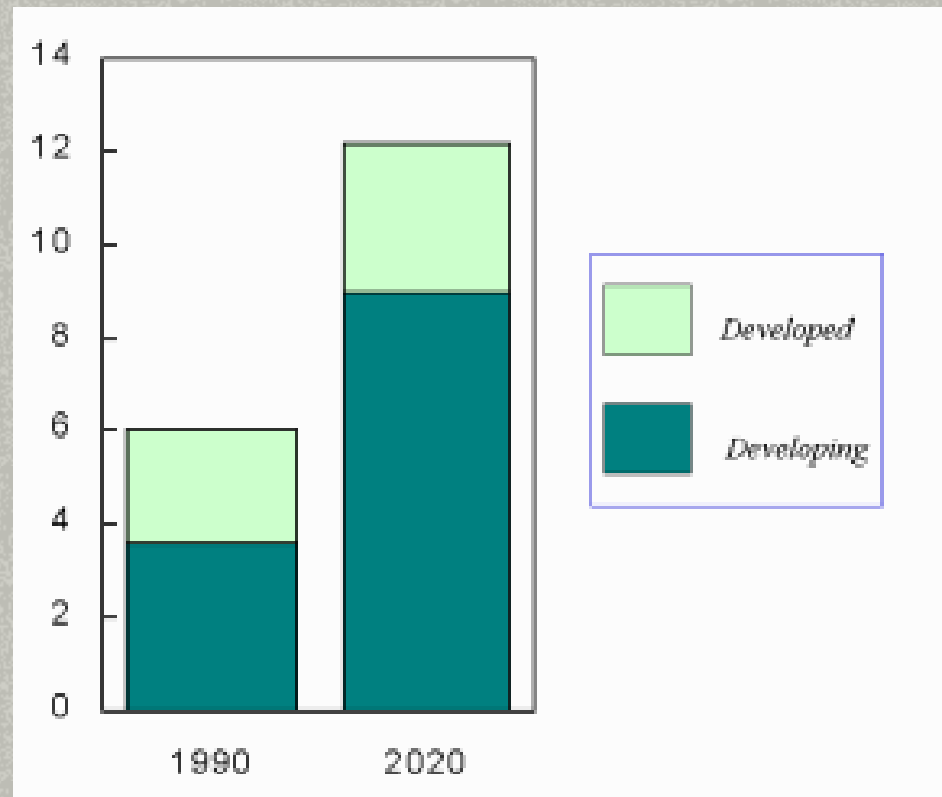
Number of New Cancer Cases and Deaths (millions)

<u>Year</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>2000</u>
Cases	5.9	7.6	10
Deaths	-	-	8



By 2020, 74% of all cancer deaths will be in the developing world

Total cancer deaths
(millions)





Global Impact of Birth Defects

- Affect 7.3 million children worldwide each year
- 1.4 million children in Africa alone
- In developing countries, many children with serious birth defects die due to inadequate care

Asthma Globally

- Affects 4%-12% of world population)
- 5 million children in the US
- 15-20 million in India alone
- High rates in other developing countries: Kenya (11%), Nigeria (18%)
- 180,000 deaths annually worldwide
- Top 10 large cities with degraded air quality for children under 5 are in Mexico, China, India, Iran, Philippines and Brazil.





WHAT WE NEED

- Communication
- Commitment
- Structure
- Actions/Solutions



G-8 Environment Ministerial Meeting March 2001 -- Trieste, Italy

- *“Protecting the health of our children is a shared fundamental value. We recognize the special vulnerability of children to environmental threats and are committed to working together to do our utmost to remove those threats. We recognize that poverty and insufficient protection from environmental threats are often found in tandem. We will work together to address the most serious environmental health threats, including microbiological and chemical contaminants in drinking water, air pollution that exacerbates illness and death from asthma and other respiratory problems, polluted water, toxic substances and pesticides.”*




North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation Council Ministers – June 2000

- Motivation for environmental progress -- *to provide conditions in which our children may grow up healthy and able to realize their full potential. “We recognize that the health and well-being of North American children depends upon clean environments.”*
- Committed to *“working together as partners to develop a cooperative agenda to protect children from environmental threats with the overall objective of reducing human-made pressures on children’s health.”*
- Starting focus on health outcomes -- *asthma and other respiratory diseases, the effects of lead on health, and the effects of exposure to other toxic substances.*



Communication

- June 1999 European Environment and Health Ministers Conference in London
- March 2002 Health and Environmental Ministers of the Americas in Ottawa
- May 2002 World Summit on Children
- August 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development



UN General Assembly Special Session on Children



- May 8-10, 2002 in NYC
- A record 192 countries have now ratified or signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- UNGASS will review progress made since 1990 under the CRC and adopt new priorities for the coming decade



The Declaration & Plan of Action

- General and specific commitments made including
- Protection and preservation the environment
- Universal access to safe drinking water and to sanitary means of excreta disposal



Water & Sanitation Balance Sheet

Source: United Nations

Goals	Gains	Unfinished Business
Water: <i>universal access to safe drinking water</i>	Some 816 million additional people obtained access to improved water supplies over the decade.	<p>Some 1.1 billion people still lack access. Global coverage increased by only 3 per cent, to 82 per cent.</p> <p>Water quality problems have grown more severe in a number of countries during the decade.</p> <p>Coverage in low-income areas remains low, especially in informal settlements</p>
Sanitation: <i>universal access to sanitary means of excreta disposal</i>	747 million additional people utilized improved sanitation facilities	<p>2.4 billion people, including half of all Asians, lack access. Global coverage increased by only 5 per cent, to 60 per cent.</p> <p>80 per cent of those lacking sanitation live in rural areas.</p>



Child Health Balance Sheet

Source: United Nations

Goals	Gains	Unfinished Business
<p>Deaths due to diarrhoea: <i>reduce them by 50 per cent</i></p> <p>Acute respiratory infections (ARI): <i>reduction of ARI deaths by one third in children under five</i></p>	<p>This goal was achieved globally, according to World Health Organization (WHO) estimates.</p> <p>ARI case management has improved at the health centre level.</p> <p>□</p>	<p>Diarrhoea remains one of the major causes of death among children.</p> <p>ARI remains one of the greatest causes of death among children.</p>



2002 language includes

Recognition of the problem

“A number of environmental problems and trends, such as global warming, ozone layer depletion, air pollution, hazardous wastes, exposure to hazardous chemicals and pesticides, inadequate sanitation, poor hygiene, unsafe drinking water and food and inadequate housing, need to be addressed to ensure the health and well-being of children.”



But more action focus statements remain in discussion

- We will take measures to manage our natural resources and protect and conserve our environment in a sustainable manner and help to break the vicious cycle of poverty and environmental degradation. We will work to change unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and help to educate all children and adults to respect the natural environment for their health and well-being.
- We will develop legislation, policies and program at the national level and enhance international cooperation to prevent the harmful exposure of children to environmental contaminants in the air, water, soil and food.



Health and Environment Ministers of the Americas

- Recognized differences between countries
- Recognized problems: air pollution, water quality, natural disasters, chemical management, climate variability, workers' health, food security
- “As initial goals, we agree to consider working towards”
- No timelines, no consequences



Words are not enough – We need actions

In order to truly protect children we need

- National commitment to improve the situation – both political and financial
- Risk assessments that take children's susceptibilities into account
- Precautionary laws and regulations when we do not know enough
- Funding for further research to examine health and environment links
- International sets of indicators
- Biomonitoring
- Exposure monitoring
- Monitoring of health outcomes in people
- Standardized data collection
- Professional training and capacity building



Structure

- WHO Children's taskforce
- UNICEF
- Offices and personnel devoted to children's issues such as USEPA
- NGO networks
- INCHES, ISDE, CEHN



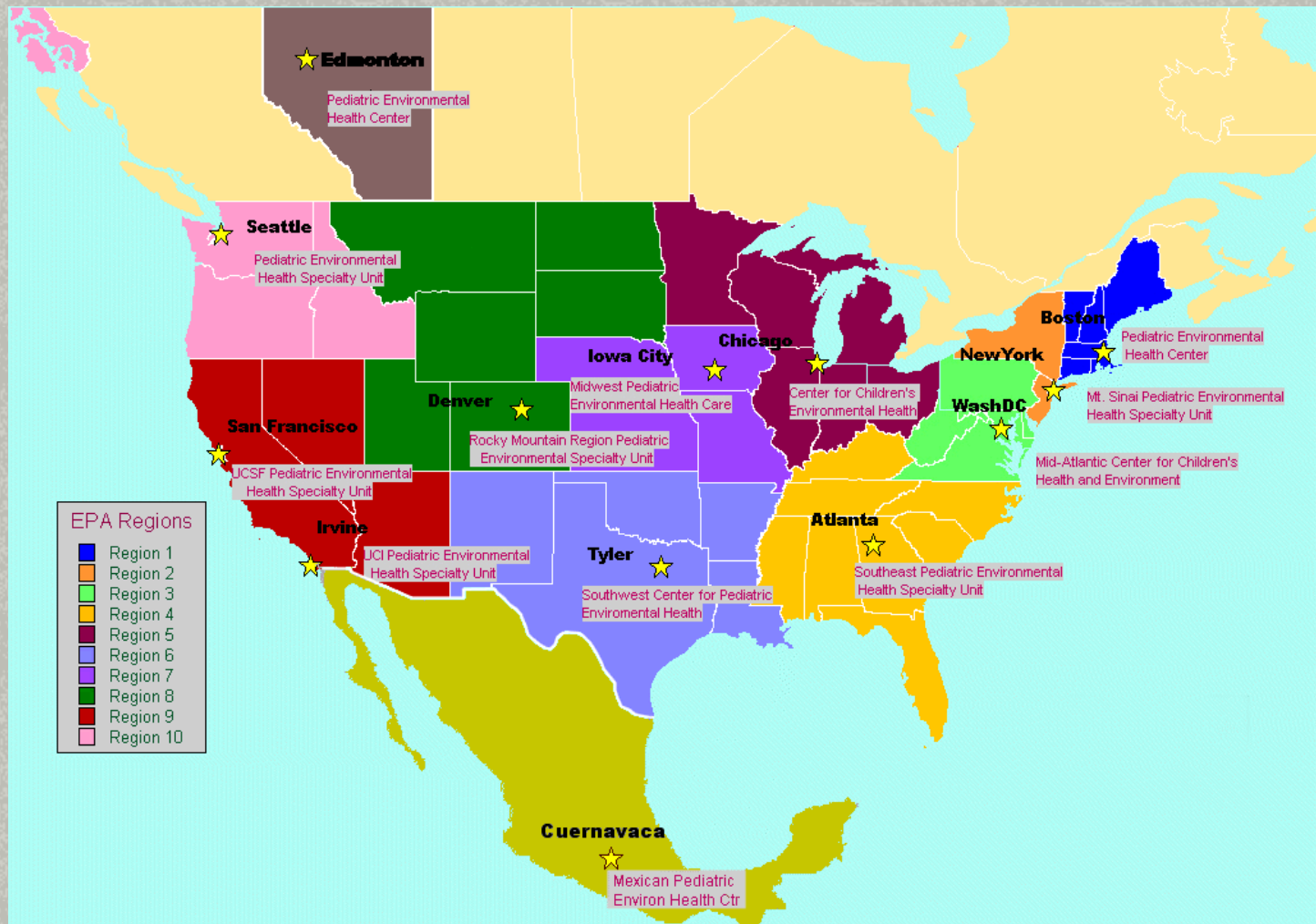
NGO Activity

Physicians for Social Responsibility

Emerging Links Project

- **Identify** chronic diseases of concern that are likely to have strong environmental associations
- **Examine** what is known about environmental associations with those diseases to inform further actions
- **Recommend** policy changes that emphasize prevention

Professional training and community outreach Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units



Take advantage of international meetings to set agendas, launch projects, and set deadlines



The World Summit on
Sustainable Development



Recommendations for Action by the WSSD

- Ratification of the Stockholm Convention on POPs
- Ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change



Recommendations for WSSD

- Governments commit to domestic steps to protect children
- Develop an international set of indicators, standardized or comparable systems and methods for tracking environmental contamination, human exposures, and relevant health outcomes in all countries
- Establish an Intergovernmental Panel on Children's Environmental Health to oversee process and serve as a research clearing house for studies done on children's environmental health.



Children Inspire Action and Commitment



Children inspire action and commitment

- Create dialogue
- Reach consensus
- Bring all sides to the table
- Create change in industry practices and individual behaviors and practices
- Influence policy for the betterment of children