



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

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OFFICE OF
AIR AND RADIATION

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Dear Dr. Martin:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency supports the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) efforts to prioritize global environmental health in its new strategic plan.

The report from your conference on January 10-13, 2007, is an excellent summary of global environmental health research needs related to each of maternal, child, and adult health. Perhaps the most compelling summary message from the report is that research on indoor smoke from cooking and heating with traditional fuels (e.g., wood, animal dung, crop residues, coal) ranks at the top of your priorities for each of these subjects. Furthermore, the top two priorities in your overall ranking – and five of the top eleven priorities – are directly related to smoke from burning these traditional fuels.

EPA undertook a similar process leading up to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and determined that indoor smoke was not only one of the world's worst environmental health risks, but widely unaddressed. We worked with about ten leading organizations to launch the Partnership for Clean Indoor Air (PCIA) at the World Summit. PCIA has since grown to comprise over 140 partners working in more than 60 countries; its mission is to improve health, livelihood, and quality of life by reducing exposure to indoor smoke, primarily among women and children.

I am proud that PCIA is now one of the global leaders in the field of reducing indoor smoke exposure from cooking and heating. EPA, with support from the United States Agency for International Development, funded ten pilot projects in eight countries that collectively reduced exposure to over 300,000 people, at a cost of less than four dollars per person. We have also worked with our partners to address several priority needs for this field, including: developing and giving several critical trainings around the globe; developing priority technical tools for the field; and, hosting three biennial forums that are the largest gatherings in this field. We are currently in the process of growing PCIA into a larger, independent, and sustainably funded entity that can help enable this field to achieve solutions at a large scale.

I am encouraged that independent, expert groups are increasingly recognizing both the risks of indoor smoke and the relative scarcity of epidemiological and exposure studies in this field. This paucity of research is startling and serves as a serious hindrance in efforts to engage governments and donors to pursue solutions. By contrast, EPA staff's recent review of our national ambient air quality standard for ozone considered 157 key epidemiological studies – that considered respiratory symptoms, lung function changes, cardiovascular outcomes, emergency department visits, hospital admissions, and mortality – as well as twenty-two key human exposure studies.¹

Efforts to reduce exposure to indoor smoke are at a critical moment. Leading donors are striving to ramp up their implementation efforts to reach a much larger scale. Major multinational corporations are investing for profit in clean stove and clean fuel markets. Across the globe, trends such as peaking environmental awareness and surging interest in biofuels are creating interesting opportunities for this field. The emergence of more complete health data is also a critically important factor, and the possibility of your increased role in this field represents a real opportunity to catalyze progress. Research on the health risks of indoor smoke will not only increase the knowledge base for the field, it will likely be widely leveraged to spur significantly increased implementation efforts to reduce these risks on the ground.

I commend NIEHS for undertaking its review of global environmental health research priorities and I enthusiastically encourage you to pursue a research agenda focused on indoor smoke and associated diseases.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Meyers
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator

¹ See appendices from the EPA Staff Paper related to the review of the national air quality ambient standard for ozone at: http://www.epa.gov/ttn/naaqs/standards/ozone/s_o3_cr_sp.html.