



PRESS RELEASE

Closing Italy's coal power plants would lead to better health

Civitavecchia / Rome, 7 April 2017 - The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) will today call on the Italian government to urgently commit to a date to phase out coal power plants as part of their energy strategy. This would achieve both short and long-term public health benefits, including saving lives and reducing serious health problems such as asthma and heart attacks.

Julia Gogolewska, HEAL's Senior Policy Officer, Energy and Health, says:

"Today on World Health Day, we will remind Italian political leaders that they have the means to protect public health from climate change. It involves phasing out coal rapidly, which is absolutely crucial to prevent large scale health impacts from climate change, including in Italy. Replacing Italy's coal power plants – including the 1,980 megawatt Torvaldaliga Nord plant here just north of Rome – with healthy and clean energy sources will result in cleaner air almost immediately as well as falls in heart and lung conditions, for example bronchitis or asthma."

She will be speaking at a meeting entitled "The coal issue: Climate and Energy (*I problemi del carbone: Clima ed Energia*)" organised by Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy Group in the European Parliament (EFDD) and Movimento (Five Star Movement) (1).

Ms Gogolewska is one of the authors of "Europe's Dark Cloud – How coal-burning countries are making their neighbours sick" which quantifies the hidden costs on health from coal in EU member states. It is estimated that the total health costs associated with fumes from coal power stations in Italy stand at between 920 and 1,720 million Euros per year. These health impacts include 620 premature deaths, 370 new cases of chronic bronchitis in adults, 190,660 days of absence from work due to associated health problems, and 16,580 days of asthma symptoms in children. (2)

"HEAL has joined other health and environmental groups calling for a complete coal phase out in Europe and for a quick yet socially just transition towards renewable energy," Ms Gogolewska adds.

Leading doctors' organisations have also called for a coal phase out on health grounds. They include the World Medical Association, British Medical Association, Canadian Medical Association and the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. In 2015, the Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change said: "The dangerous impacts of coal on health from exposure to air pollution... and the major contribution that burning coal and the release of greenhouse gases has in changing the long-term climate almost certainly undermines the use of coal as a long-term fuel." (3)

Prof Francesco Forastiere of the European Respiratory Society says climate change and lung health are closely linked. "Heatwaves and higher temperatures result in poorer air quality that affects the health of vulnerable people most. Children, older people and those with existing lung and heart conditions suffer disproportionately. We need to urgently act on climate change to protect those who are at the greatest risk."

Italy has already witnessed some of the health impacts of climate change. In 2003, Italians with existing heart and lung conditions were adversely affected by the summer heatwave, which caused 20,000 excess deaths. Four years later, transmission of the mosquito-borne chikungunya was

reported for the first time in Europe in a localized outbreak in north-eastern Italy. The 197 cases recorded during this outbreak confirmed that outbreaks of what had been a condition limited to Africa, Asia and the Indian sub-continent could occur in Europe. (4)

Contacts:

Julia Gogolewska, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), julia@env-health.org Mobile: +49 176 307 65177

Diana Smith, HEAL Communications and Media Adviser, Diana@env-health.org, mobile: +33 6 33 04 2943

Notes:

1. Agenda available on request
2. EEB, CAN Europe, HEAL, Sandbag and WWF, Europe's Dark Cloud, How coal-burning countries are making their neighbours sick, 2016 (pages 34-36) <http://www.env-health.org/policies/climate-and-energy/europe-s-dark-cloud/>
3. The Lancet Commission on Climate Change <http://www.thelancet.com/climate-and-health>
4. World Health Organization, Chikungunya, Fact sheet, Updated April 2017 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs327/en/>

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is a leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union (EU). With the support of more than 70 member organisations, HEAL brings independent expertise and evidence from the health community to different decision-making processes. Our broad alliance represents health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, doctors, nurses, cancer and asthma groups, citizens, women's groups, youth groups, environmental NGOs, scientists and public health research institutes. Members include international and Europe-wide organisations as well as national and local groups. Website: www.env-health.org. Follow HEAL on [Facebook](#) and Twitter [@HealthandEnv](#) [@EDCFree](#) and [@CHM HEAL](#)