



PRESS RELEASE

Climate change and health week (19-23 September 2011, Poland)

Fewer carbon emissions means better health and greater productivity

Warsaw, Poland, 19 September 2011 - European non-governmental organisations hope to share recent findings on the health and economic benefits of tackling climate change with senior government officials and other top policy makers in Warsaw and Poznan this week. (1)

The aim is to convince senior decision-makers that stronger targets on climate change would substantially benefit public health and the economy in Poland. The European Union's current target of a 20% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020 is too low to mitigate harmful climate change. (2)

"Findings like these may encourage Polish decision makers to look at the reduction of emissions from a broader perspective, and may help them see the positive influence of its "side effect" – the cleaner air – on the health of the citizens, and the state budget. This is especially important now, since Poland currently holds the Presidency of the European Union, and will play an important role prior to and during the forthcoming climate change summit in Durban in December 2011," says Urszula Stefanowicz, spokesperson for Climate Coalition. (3)

Dr Pendo Maro representing Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) continues: "Now is the moment for the EU - independently of other countries - to move its carbon emissions reduction target to at least 30% below 1990 levels by 2020. EU countries should lead the world in a move towards a sustainable low carbon society producing substantial health benefits and increased productivity." (4)

By moving to a 30% target, EU member states would reap health benefits of up to 30.5 billion Euros by 2020, according to HEAL/HCWH research. Poland would achieve savings of up to 4 billion Euros in 2020 (approximately 13% of the total gains) made up, for example, of over 500 fewer cardiac and respiratory hospital admissions annually from 2020 onwards and almost 400,000 fewer working days lost each year from 2020. (5)

These benefits would accrue as an unintended side-effect or "co-benefit" of stronger climate change policy. As greenhouse gas levels fall, cleaner power generation and less polluting transport leads to better air quality; this prompts substantial improvements in respiratory and heart health. (5)

Poland would do particularly well from the European Union adopting a 30% target on emission reductions not only as a result of its own internal action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also because, being not far from the centre of the EU, it would pick up the benefit of actions to reduce emissions and therefore clean up the air in surrounding EU countries, such as Germany and Hungary. Combined with the size of its population this makes a substantial benefit for people's health and productivity.

Health impact of climate change

Evidence that human-induced climate change is taking place - and influencing health - is growing. Of greatest concern in Europe are extreme weather events, including heat waves that creates peaks in air pollution, flooding and resurgences of infectious diseases.

The World Health Organization says that extreme high air temperatures contribute directly to deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory disease, particularly among elderly people. In the heat wave of summer 2003 in Europe for example, more than 70 000 excess deaths were recorded. (6)

The European Respiratory Society, which brings together 11,000 doctors and experts in lung health, has published research showing that for every 1 degree Celsius increase in summer temperatures above defined European city-specific levels, overall death rates increase by 1-3%, and by 6% amongst people with existing respiratory conditions. (7)

Notes for journalists:

1. The NGO delegation comprises Dr Pendo Maro, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe; Ms Christina Reinards, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) in Brussels (1) and Ms. Urszula Stefanowicz, from Polish partner organisation, the Climate Coalition. They hope to meet Marek Haber, Undersecretary of State, Polish Ministry of Health in Poznan and representatives at the Ministry of the Economy in Warsaw. Dr Maro will give a presentation at the "*Effectively and ecologically. Implementation of energy efficiency projects in healthcare*" conference in Poznan.
2. IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) 4th Assessment Report, 2007, IPCC recommendations: collective greenhouse gas emissions reductions by and within industrialised countries of 25-40% by 2020 from 1990 levels are needed to give only a 50-50 chance of limiting warming to 2 degrees.
3. Climate Coalition <http://www.koalicjaklimatyczna.org/>
4. Although Poland has not been a supporter of more ambition within EU climate policy, senior advisor to the Polish minister on climate policy, Tomasz Chruszczow said in an interview in London on 13 September 2011: "You must not make the mistake of confusing the aims of the EU [under our presidency] and our domestic arrangements on how to meet our targets." Can Poland lead on coal, shale gas and Europe's climate talks? <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/damian-carrington-blog/2011/sep/12/global-climate-talks-poland-eu-coal-shale-gas>
5. Report by Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Health Care Without Harm, "Acting now for a better health. A 30% reduction target for EU climate policy." (2010). For details of health benefits in Poland, see chart on page 36
6. World Health Organization, Climate change and health, Fact sheet N°266, January 2010 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs266/en/index.html>
7. Position statement, Climate change and respiratory disease: European Respiratory Society, JG Ayres et al, European Respiratory Journal; 34: 295-302, <http://erj.ersjournals.com/content/34/2/295.full>

Contacts:

Pendo Maro, Senior Climate and Energy Advisor, Health Care Without Harm and Health and Environment Alliance, Tel: + 32 2 234 3642; + 322 503 4011; Mobile phone: +32 495 281 494
Email: pendo@env-health.org; pendo.maro@hcwh.org

Urszula Stefanowicz, Project manager, Climate Coalition, Polish Ecological Club Mazovian Branch, Tel: +48 22 827 33 70, e-mail: u.stefanowicz@koalicjaklimatyczna.org

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union. We demonstrate how policy changes can help protect health and enhance people's quality of life.

HEAL's more than 65 member organisations, representing health professionals, patients, citizens, women, youth and environmental experts, help to bring independent expertise and evidence from the health community to different decision-making processes. Members include international and Europe-wide organisations, as well as national and local groups. www.env-health.org

Health Care Without Harm is a global network of more than 470 organizations in over 52 countries working to transform the health care sector so it is no longer a source of harm to people and the environment.

The Climate Coalition is an association of 22 Polish organisations working on climate and energy issues. Its mission is joint action to prevent human-induced climate change, for the benefit of humanity and environment. More information available on the website: <http://koalicjaklimatyczna.org/lang/ang/>