



Personal biography

Génon K. Jensen is Executive Director of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), which she set up in Brussels, Belgium in 2003.

Ms. Jensen's work has been instrumental in bringing the health impact of chemicals and pesticides, climate change and air pollution to the EU political agenda in a process involving the European health and medical community.

Toxic chemicals are a cornerstone of Ms Jensen's wider European and international work as a member of the WHO European Environment and Health Task Force, which implements the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE), and as the coordinator for working groups of the US Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE).

Ms Jensen has written many journal articles on health and environmental issues, and stimulated coverage in EU, European national and medical media, particularly around the benefits to health accrued from climate and environmental policies. She has recently contributed a chapter to the first-ever "Textbook of children's environmental health" published by Oxford University Press.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Better environmental policy can help prevent breast cancer

Verdala Palace, Malta, 4 February 2015

Génon K Jensen, Executive Director of Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), is a keynote speaker at the Conference to celebrate World Cancer Day 2015 organised by Action for Breast Cancer Foundation, Malta.

Her presentation is entitled the role of "**Environmental policy as a lever for cancer prevention**".

She will welcome Malta's initiative to emphasise the often forgotten aspect of the fight against cancer.

"HEAL welcomes Malta's initiative on World Cancer Day to highlight a missing link in cancer prevention by focussing on the role of environmental policy. We hope the experience can inspire other European countries to take up the issue during European Week against Cancer in May.

Within the past 18 months, the World Health Organization's cancer agency (IARC) has officially recognised air pollution as a contributor to lung cancer. The experts also noted a positive association between higher levels of air pollution and an increased risk of bladder cancer.

Some chemicals in the work and home environment are known to be carcinogenic; others disrupt the human hormone system and are associated with hormonal cancers, such as breast cancer and prostate cancer. The incidence of both these cancers is high having increased rapidly in recent decades in Europe. Experts are in agreement that these upward trends cannot derive from genetics, or an aging population nor on better screening alone; environmental factors, especially exposure to certain hazardous chemicals, is one of the likely causes.

National cancer plans often address environmental factors – but much more needs to be done if the opportunities for primary prevention of cancer are to be fully optimised.

HEAL has been working since its inception in 2003 to bring attention to opportunities for preventing chronic conditions, including cancer, through the promotion of a less toxic environment. The following are some examples of some events, activities and publications related to cancer prevention.

It is part of a coalition of non-governmental organisations called 'EDC-Free Europe' (www.edc-free-europe.org/) which has recently helped more than 20,000 ordinary individuals to respond to an EU consultation on EDCs via an online platform (<https://www.no2hormonedisruptingchemicals.org/en>) Some respondents were from national cancer groups, such as the Belgian (Flemish) Cancer League, Breast Cancer UK, Alliance for Cancer Prevention, Cancer Prevention and Education Society.

MEPs Against Cancer meeting, January 2015

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) met at the European Parliament on Wednesday 7 January to discuss the significance for cancer control of a recent consultation organised by the European Commission on endocrine disrupting chemicals. The meeting was jointly organised by HEAL and Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL), which provides the secretariat for MEPs Against Cancer.

Wendy Tse Yared, Director, ECL, told the meeting how “curbing exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals should become a central part of cancer prevention strategy in Europe.” She said: “It represents an exciting opportunity for prevention because reducing exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals in our everyday environment may stop cancers before they start.”

In closing the meeting, Danish MEP Christel Schaldemose, Vice-President, MEPs Against Cancer (Denmark) said: “My hope is that this MEPs Against Cancer meeting will help convince the commission that action now needs to happen. Not tomorrow, but today.” Her editorial for the European Parliament on-line magazine is available here:

<https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/europe-wide-cancer-group-calls-action-hormone-disruptors>

Documentary screenings

“Living downstream” was shown in the European Parliament in 2010 as part of events organised by HEAL in a Cancer and Environment Week. The film is the personal testimony of scientist and cancer survivor Sandra Steingraber as she makes the intimate connections between our health and the health of air, land and water. <http://www.env-health.org/news/latest-news/article/cancer-and-environment-week>. An educational guide, *Living Downstream - In the Community* provides a useful tool for non-profit organisations, community groups, and professionals seeking to engage individuals in

the topic of cancer and the environment. It is designed to raise awareness and inspire action around screenings of the film and for training screening organizers.

“La Mort est dans le Pré” (Death is in the meadow) is a documentary that was shown in Brussels recently followed by a debate with representatives of the French pesticide victims’ association who feature in the film. French director Eric Guéret immersed himself for a year in the lives of these individuals to help overcome the silence within the agricultural community. Although many farmers do not talk about these issues and often refuse to make the link between pesticides and diseases, the health of hundreds are affected by exposure to pesticides. Pesticide use has led to the development of life threatening diseases and conditions including cancer, such as lymphoma and brain tumours, and Parkinson’s disease, especially in cereal and vine growers and other agricultural workers.

“The Human Experiment” (narrated by Sean Penn) and “In Small Print” were shown at the Paris international environmental film festival (FIFE) in February 2014 as part of HEAL’s “Health and Environment” screenings and debate. Both films address the role of environmental factors in the development of cancer. <http://www.env-health.org/resources/projects/fife-film-festival-2014>

Publications

Last year, HEAL published “**Health Costs in the European Union: How much is related to EDCs?**” It found that health savings of up to €31 billion per year could be made in the European Union by reducing exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals. These costs are associated with a range of chronic conditions that are linked to exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals, including infertility, breast, prostate and testicular cancer, autism and ADHD, obesity and diabetes. In Malta, the costs are estimated at up to €517 million per year.

HEAL has widely promoted reports on cancer and environmental exposure produced by partner organisation, CHEM Trust. HEAL’s information brochure on breast cancer is available here: Breast cancer: Preventing the preventable <http://www.env-health.org/resources/publications/article/breast-cancer-preventing-the>

Other resources

[Which pesticides are used in my School? Pesticides in schools: Short guide](#) Toolkit with survey and guide: (2010)

[Six steps to pesticide reduction: toolkit for communities and individuals wishing to reduce local pesticide use](#) (2010)

[HEAL Position Paper: Preventing cancer through environmental policy change \(2011\)](#)

[HEAL Briefing paper: Reducing cancer through environmental policy change \(2011\)](#)

HEAL webpage on Cancer: <http://www.env-health.org/policies/other-issues/cancer/>

HEAL Cancer Prevention and Environment news service (listserv, write to info@env-health.org to be included in mailings).

Chemical Health Monitor webpages on Breast Cancer, Testicular Cancer, Prostate Cancer

Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE) coordinates working groups on “Cancer” and “Breast Cancer”

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](#)