



**International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH)**

## **World Environmental Health Day 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

### **Message from Peter Archer, IFEH President**

I am delighted to confirm the theme for this year's WEHD. At the recent IFEH Board of Directors meeting there was unanimous support for the theme this year to be:

***'indoor & outdoor air quality'***

The choice of this theme is very relevant as on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017 Margaret Chan, Director General at WHO launched a worldwide campaign to tackle air pollution as the 'major public health issue of our generation'. Dr. Chan said that the dangers of failing to control all forms of air pollution were much greater than the risks caused by diseases such as Ebola, & HIV AIDS. WHO states poor quality air affects more than 80% of the world's population.

All IFEH members are encouraged to make a real effort this year to promote WEHD as we anticipate that the health impact of poor air quality will now escalate year by year. We leave it to individual MOs to decide how to approach World Environmental Health Day; for some they will concentrate on indoor air quality, perhaps the use of inappropriate fuels for cooking and heating or the impact of other forms of pollution such as second hand smoke. The promotion of existing projects such as AirTEXT in London might be an attractive approach.

Please keep the IFEH webmaster informed of progress when planning your projects for this year's WEHD, (Henning Hansen - [henning.hansen@ifeh.org](mailto:henning.hansen@ifeh.org)).

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## Background evidence

World Health Organisation – 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017

### Ongoing and emerging environmental threats to children's health

"A polluted environment results in a heavy toll on the health of our children," says Dr Maria Neira, WHO Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health. "Investing in the removal of environmental risks to health, such as improving water quality or using cleaner fuels, will result in massive health benefits."

With climate change, temperatures and levels of carbon dioxide are rising, favouring pollen growth which is associated with increased rates of asthma in children. Worldwide, 11–14% of children aged 5 years and older currently report asthma symptoms and an estimated 44% of these are related to environmental exposures. Air pollution, second-hand tobacco smoke, and indoor mould and dampness make asthma more severe in children.

In households without access to basic services, such as safe water and sanitation, or that are smoky due to the use of unclean fuels, such as coal or dung for cooking and heating, children are at an increased risk of diarrhoea and pneumonia.

Children are also exposed to harmful chemicals through food, water, air and products around them. Chemicals, such as fluoride, lead and mercury pesticides, persistent organic pollutants, and others in manufactured goods, eventually find their way into the food chain. And, while leaded petrol has been phased out almost entirely in all countries, lead is still widespread in paints, affecting brain development.

### Making all places safe for children

Reducing air pollution inside and outside households, improving safe water and sanitation and improving hygiene (including in health facilities where women give birth), protecting pregnant women from second-hand tobacco smoke, and building safer environments, can prevent children's deaths and diseases.

For example, multiple government sectors can work together to improve the following:

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- Housing: Ensure clean fuel for heating and cooking, no mould or pests, and remove unsafe building materials and lead paint.
  - Schools: Provide safe sanitation and hygiene, free of noise, pollution, and promote good nutrition.
  - Health facilities: Ensure safe water, sanitation and hygiene, and reliable electricity.
  - Urban planning: Create more green spaces, safe walking and cycling paths.
  - Transport: Reduce emissions and increase public transport.
  - Agriculture: Reduce the use of hazardous pesticides and no child labour.
  - Industry: Manage hazardous waste and reduce the use of harmful chemicals.
  - Health sector: Monitor health outcomes and educate about environmental health effects and prevention.

Under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) countries are working on a set of targets to guide interventions for children's environmental health, as well as to end preventable deaths of

newborns and children under five by 2030. In addition to SDG 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, other SDGs work to improve water, sanitation and hygiene, transition to clean energy to reduce air pollution, and reverse climate change – all of which will have an impact on children’s health.

Bad environments are responsible for one in four deaths among all children under five, according to new World Health Organisation reports, with toxic air, unsafe water, and lack of sanitation the leading causes.

The [reports](#) found polluted environments cause the deaths of 1.7 million children every year, but that many of the deaths could be prevented by interventions already known to work, such as providing cleaner cooking fuels to prevent indoor air pollution.

“A polluted environment is a deadly one, particularly for young children,” said Dr Margaret Chan, director-general of the WHO. “Their developing organs and immune systems – and smaller bodies and airways – make them especially vulnerable to dirty air and water.”

The harm from air pollution can begin in the womb and increase the risk of premature birth. After birth, air pollution raises the risk of pneumonia, a major cause of death for under fives, and of lifelong lung conditions such as asthma. It may also increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and cancer in later life.

## **WHO chief: Air pollution link to 600,000 deaths in children**

**6 March 2017** Last updated at 00:29 GMT

The director general of the World Health Organization has said air pollution is "one of the most pernicious threats" facing global public health today and is on a much bigger scale than HIV or Ebola.

Dr Margaret Chan told the [Today programme](#) that poor air quality was having a disproportionate impact on the young.

She said indoor and outdoor pollution was linked to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children each year.