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**EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT
(EUR-OPA)**

PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY RECOMMENDATION 1863 (2009)

**Environment and health: better prevention of environment-related
health hazards**

Presented to the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents
of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA),

Paris, 6-7 April 2009

FOR INFORMATION AND POSSIBLE COMMENTS

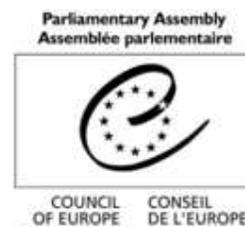
At its 1052nd meeting (25 March 2009), the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe examined Recommendation 1863 (2009) adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly on 13 March 2009 (cf. appended text).

The Deputies decided to bring it to the attention of their governments and agreed to communicate it, amongst other bodies, to the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), for information and possible comments by 30 June 2009.

As this Recommendation concerns health matters which do not fall within the expertise of the Agreement, which only deals in its working programmes with disaster medicine, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents is requested to take note of Recommendation 1863 (2009) attached.

APPENDIX

Parliamentary **Assembly**
Assemblée parlementaire



Provisional edition

Environment and health: better prevention of environment-related health hazards

Recommendation 1863 (2009)¹

1. The Parliamentary Assembly, like other international organisations such as the European Union, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the European Environment Agency, etc, notes that there are increasing links between environmental pollution and ever greater and more obvious health risks. Environment-related pathologies are not confined to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and specific types of cancer, but also include other chronic and emerging pathologies which are also deemed to have links with the environment, including immune system impairment, neurological and neurodegenerative illnesses and disruptions of the hormonal and reproductive system.
2. Since embryos, fetuses, neonates and children are even more sensitive to environmental factors than adults, the Assembly alerts all governments and all the responsible organisations and stakeholders to the need to protect or restore a healthy environment and thus guarantee the future of our children and future generations.
3. The Assembly has repeatedly stressed the importance of the states' commitment to preserving the environment and environmental health as set out in many conferences, charters, conventions, declarations and protocols since the United Nations Conference on the Environment and the "Stockholm Declaration" (1972). It more particularly welcomes the research efforts and action plans launched since the WHO-Europe Conference on Health and Environment (Budapest, 2004).
4. The Assembly nevertheless regrets that, despite calls for the precautionary principle and despite all the recommendations, declarations and a number of statutory and legislative advances, there is still a lack of reaction to known or emerging environmental and health risks and the virtually systematic delays in adopting and implementing effective preventive measures. There has thus been little improvement in the situation of multiple and chronic exposure to multiform pollution and environmental pathologies are still as worrying as ever.
5. In the light of the known results of scientific expertise in this field, it considers that the political authorities must act upstream in order to prevent disease and health crises.
6. The Assembly stresses the importance of all forms of prevention and early detection where environmental health policy is concerned, and believes that primary prevention of environmental risks must be encouraged above all.
7. Risk assessment must be based solely on scientific criteria, which means that it must be shielded from any kind of pressure exerted by the political authorities or economic lobbies, and must take account of the often insidious effects of chronic exposure to low or threshold exposure doses of a range of pollutants working in combination. Even in small doses, a "cocktail" of pollutants in the air, water, food and in everyday consumer products, and also in building materials (such as asbestos), can have a serious effect on human health.

8. Such assessment must above all take account of the fact that it is not only the dose that makes the poison but also the period of exposure, the accumulative mechanisms and individual sensitivities to pollutants or mixtures of pollutants.

9. For over twenty years, scientists, field doctors and environmental physicians as well as experts and environmental specialists have been alerting the public authorities and medical circles to the new health risks and environmental pathologies arising out of the insidious increase in pollution in all environments, in the food chain and in the human organism itself.

10. The Assembly acknowledges the primordial role played by civil society and associations working to protect the environment and environmental health in terms not only of sounding the alarm and denouncing health scandals but also of producing preventive strategies and action plans.

11. Faced with the increasing risks to the environment, wildlife and human health, particularly that of future generations, the Assembly supports the research efforts being made at the European and international levels to assess, with the requisite degree of certainty, the impact of low doses of chemical pollutants and ionising and non-ionising radiation on human health.

12. The Assembly takes note of the fact that in the environmental health field, all the players, including toxicologists, epidemiologists and environmental physicians, agree that environmental pollution has a negative impact on human health and advocate improving the prevention of health disorders linked to such pollution. Environmental medicine is a new transverse medical discipline which has been emerging and developing for a number of years.

13. The Assembly notes that the number of individuals actually suffering from diseases linked to the environment is regularly growing, in an increasingly disturbing manner.

14. Stressing the need for urgent practical action to curb the increase in known or emerging risks, the Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to invite member states and observers of the Council of Europe to:

14.1. recognise the close links between the environment and health and to provide co-ordinated, strong policies in this area;

14.2. promote the positive health effects of access to a good quality environment and recognise the negative health effects that may result from poor environmental quality. This should be reflected in the National Public Health Document, which each member state should submit to the Council of Europe Secretariat;

14.3. apply the precautionary principle in order to prevent major dramatic health crises in future caused by environmental risk factors;

14.4. ensure that scientific experts can work in an independent, transparent and democratic manner in accordance with the principles of adversarial and pluridisciplinary research;

14.5. guarantee the application of transparent criteria in the choice of the different experts and to improve their status, as well as to enhance the protection of "whistle-blowers";

14.6. support actively the participation of civil society in public adversarial debates on present and future technological choices and challenges and acceptable risk levels (impact assessment);

14.7. intensify urgently and substantially the efforts to devise a global policy for preventing chronic diseases associated with the environment, as well as environmental health policy action plans, as an incentive for the sustainable and ecologically responsible restructuring of all fields of political and human activity;

- 14.8. adopt prevention policies in all fields, in terms of consumer food production and processing and service development, in order to foster the development of a new health protection-oriented economy;
- 14.9. establish a clear communication channel between member states on the health risks of pollution. This will enable the public to make up their own mind about the impact of the environment on their health, and make choices to improve their own health;
- 14.10. contribute actively to the establishment and reinforcement of a more responsible chemical production policy, by withdrawing from the market all carcinogenic, mutagenic, reprotoxic and neurotoxic substances, implementing a firm substitution policy and encouraging industrialists (by means of tax and financial measures) to move on to safer, less polluting products;
- 14.11. support organic agriculture and regulate less pesticide-intensive agricultural production methods, develop less polluting modes of energy production, reduce the impact on health of road traffic and promote a building policy that takes account of the impact of construction and building materials on health;
- 14.12. take account of the warnings of the European Environment Agency regarding electromagnetic pollution and specific health risks attributed to mobile phone systems;
- 14.13. foster measures, in their prevention programmes or action plans, to train and educate people in environmental health risks at all levels of society, and to develop exchanges between experts and citizens and between physicians and patients;
- 14.14. recognise environmental medicine as a new transverse medical discipline and develop harmonised initial and further training programmes for students and physicians at the European level;
- 14.15. reinforce and ensure the general implementation, in connection with the problem of pollution inside houses or buildings, of the "green ambulance" system (mobile laboratories analysing homes and buildings at the request of the individuals concerned, in liaison with their family doctors, and the intervention and expertise of indoor environment counsellors), and to provide new types of training courses for medical advisers on interior environment;
- 14.16. improve provision, by better reimbursement of diagnostic and therapeutic expenses, for persons suffering from illnesses associated with the environment, who often face major protracted suffering involving high personal costs;
- 14.17. support actively, by means of subsidies, contracts and partnership agreements, patients' associations working in the field of environmental health and diseases associated with the environment.
15. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to instruct a committee of experts to elaborate a draft recommendation based on the elements above.

¹. Text adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Assembly on 13 March 2009 (see Doc. [11788](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Huss; opinion of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Hancock).