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~~ **Healthy Environments for Children Alliance** ~~~
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HECANET EMAIL UPDATES

June 2004

~ A service provided for HECA by [the United Nations Environment Programme](#)
(UNEP) ~

HECA is a world-wide alliance to reduce environmental risks to children's health that arise from the settings where they live, learn, play, and sometimes work, by providing knowledge, increasing political will, mobilizing resources, and catalysing intense and urgent action.

HECANET is an international mailing list dedicated to promoting healthy environments for children. The list provides updates on the activities of the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance (HECA) and its members, as well as an overview of media coverage of children's environmental health issues and relevant meetings, research findings and information and advocacy resources.

~~ **IN THIS ISSUE** ~~

~ **EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES** ~

- (1) Fourth European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, Budapest, 23-25 June 2004
- (2) HECA Developments
- (3) Member Activities

* If you would like your activities reflected in the next issue of HECANET, please send information to heca@nyo.unep.org

~ **ARTICLES** ~

Children's environmental health issues were covered extensively by the media in the month of June. The Budapest Fourth European

Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, which adopted a Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe, generated significant press coverage, particularly with the release of related studies/publications. The press also devoted attention to newly released studies dealing with a range of issues including the effects of chemicals on child brain development, flame retardants, air pollution on fetuses, climate changes on asthma, and pesticides on child development. Summaries of articles grouped under the following themes appear below, with links to their full texts:

- (1) **Meetings:** Fourth European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, Budapest, 23-25 June 2004
 - (2) **Air Pollution:** (a) General, (b) Indoor air pollution, (c) Outdoor air pollution, (d) Climate Change
 - (3) **Chemicals:** (a) General, (b) Lead, (c) Pesticides, (d) Mercury, (e) Fire Retardants
 - (4) **Water and Sanitation**
 - (5) **Miscellaneous**
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~ **EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES** ~

~~ **Fourth European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, Budapest, 23-25 June 2004** ~~

a) *During* the conference HECA organized a side event entitled "Healthy Environments for Children: Connecting Experiences from around the World". The panel highlighted initiatives in children's environmental health in various countries and regions of the world, and considered also the applicability of the European health and environment process to other regions of the world. Panelists included senior representatives from WHO Headquarters and Regional Offices, and speakers from Argentina, the US, South Africa, and Austria.

b) *HECA* also distributed a range of promotional materials, including policy briefs on children's environmental health issues – which will soon be available on-line.

c) An [Atlas on Children's Health and the Environment](#) was launched by *WHO* which brings together in visual form a range of facts about the effects of environmental risks to children's health. Extensively illustrated, the Atlas demonstrates the threats children face everywhere,

and underscores the impact of poverty on children's health and the efforts needed to tackle environmental problems.

d) Also launched was the first WHO global e-library on children's health and environment, compiled by the WHO's European Office. The "Budapest Collection" is made up of more than 100 documents concerning the effect on children's health of environmental risk factors (outdoor and indoor air pollution, water and sanitation, chemicals, injuries, food safety and nutrition, global climate change, socioeconomic determinants and tobacco); the documents were published by WHO Headquarters and its six Regional Offices between the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in London in 1999 and the Budapest Fourth Ministerial Conference. Copies of the "Budapest Collection" can be requested by writing to gcc@who.it or fgi@who.it

~~ HECA Developments ~~

Seed-funding for Implementation of HEC Country-level Projects: small amounts of seed funding are to be made available by HECA to help initiate and support work in children's health and environment at country and community level. Support will be given to a diversity of initiatives, driven by national priorities and local needs, provided they fit within the broad HECA framework. Priority will be given to projects addressing multiple risks in an integrated and cross-sectoral manner, in the home and school settings. Proposals are requested by mid-August. Contact Dr. Yasmin Von Schirnding, manager: HECA Secretariat, for details and application forms.

~~ Member Activities ~~

a) UNEP, WHO, FAO and IOMC have published a booklet on '[Childhood Pesticide Poisoning](#)'. The document provides information and advocacy directed at reducing pesticide poisoning and addressing its effects on women and children.

b) *Asociacion* Argentina de Medicos por el Medio Ambiente (AAMMA) /International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE) Latin America:

* *City of* Asunción, Paraguay, October 17th, 2004: ISDE. LA is co-organizing with the Paraguayan Society of Pediatrics a Pre-congress Training Workshop for Pediatricians: "*Children and Environment: a vulnerable population at risk*", in the framework of the activities of the IX Paraguayan Congress of Pediatrics.

City of Trujillo, Peru, October 14th, 2004: ISDE. LA is co-organizing with the Peruvian Society of Pediatrics a Pre-congress Training Workshop for Pediatricians: "*Environmental threats to children's health*", in the framework of the activities of the XIII Peruvian Congress of Pediatrics.

These activities are organized as part of the programs on CEH for Latin America of the International Society of Doctors for the Environment, ISDE, America Latina and International Network on Children's Health, Environment and Safety, INCHEC. More information at www.aamma.org

* City of Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 16th, 2004: AAMMA-ISDE. LA is invited to lecture on "*CEH: Exposure to pesticides at child rural labor*" at the International Seminar on "Pesticides, transgenic and valuation of biological and cultural diversity" organized by the Network on Pesticides and Alternatives in Latin America (RAPAL) and the Center for the Assessment of Appropriated Technologies for Argentina (CETAAR).

~ **ARTICLES** ~

~~ **MEETINGS** ~~

Fourth European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, Budapest, 23-25 June 2004:

[European ministers pledge to confront polluters to save children](#)

European ministers pledged on Friday to tackle by 2007 environmental problems that reportedly kill five million children annually worldwide, at a WHO meeting in Budapest. Terra Wire, Terra Daily, Budapest. 25 Jun 2004

[Europe's five enviro-health concerns](#)

Just four conditions account for one death in three among young Europeans, WHO says. The WHO lists them as injuries, unsafe water, and indoor and outdoor air pollution. And although lead tends not to be a killer, it is still a major source of poisoning among children. Alex Kirby. BBC News. 18 June 2004.

[Environment hazards a big killer of children-study](#)

The findings by the health experts suggest that environmental hazards such as pollution, unsafe water, poor sanitation, lead poisoning and injuries are the cause of one third of child and adolescent deaths in the European region. Patricia Reaney. Reuters. 18 June 2004

[Third of Europe's child deaths environment-related](#)

According to WHO, dirty or unsafe environments are to blame for a third of all child deaths in Europe. Also, children in the poorer regions still pay a heavy price for breathing in polluted air, drinking unclean water and absorbing lead contamination. Andy Coghlan. NewScientist.com News Service. 17 June 2004

[Pollution and roads kill 100,000 children a year in Europe](#)

The profound and damaging impact of Europe's environment on children has been quantified for the first time by experts who have found that a third of their ill-health and 100,000 deaths a year are caused by air pollution, unsafe water, lead and injuries. Sarah Boseley. The Guardian. 18 June 2004

[WHO Sees Great Environmental Harm to Children](#)

One-third of all child deaths in Europe are caused by the environment, WHO claimed on Friday. The statement represents a final bid to grab media attention before ministerial talks on environment and health in Budapest this week, the centerpiece of which will be adoption of a children's health and environment action plan for Europe. Environment Daily, June 21, 2004

[European Youth Focus of Environmental Health Action Plan](#)

Air pollution affects the unborn, with damaging effects on children's health later in life, says an expert group of public health scientists from Europe and North America convened by WHO. The panel presented its findings to ministers of health and environment from 52 countries in the European region gathered here this week to adopt an action plan to improve children's health. Alexandru R.Savulescu. Environment News Service (ENS). Budapest, Hungary. 25 June 2004 (subscription required)

[Europe Embarks on Environment and Health Action Plan](#)

The European Commission has launched an action plan to reduce diseases caused by a polluted environment. The plan, which covers the period 2004-2010, involves setting up a system for improved cooperation between health, environment and research sectors on a scale not achieved before. Environment News Service (ENS). 10 June 2004 (subscription required)

[Environment Blamed for One in Three European Child Deaths](#)

According to WHO's European Region, one in three child deaths in Europe is due to environmental factors, such as outdoor and indoor air pollution, unsafe water, lead and injuries. Environment News Service (ENS). Budapest, Hungary. 21 June 2004 (subscription required)

[Global Sewage, Poor Air Harming Children, WHO Says](#)

More than 1 million liters of raw sewage enter the Ganges River each minute, adding to the dirty water, polluted air and other environmental hazards that kill more than 3 million children under age 5 around the world each year, according to WHO. Environment, UN Wire. 24 June 2004

[Whose Health Organization?](#)

The pessimistic picture painted by WHO in a series of publications and most recently at a conference in Budapest last week attended by activists, bureaucrats and politicians. But the reality is rather different and the policy proposals promoted by the WHO will do more harm than good. Jaap Hanekamp and Julian Morris. The Wall Street Journal. 29 June 2004 (subscription required)

~~ AIR POLLUTION ~~

a) **General:**

[Poor air 'harms lungs of unborn'](#)

Air pollution can damage the lungs of children even before birth, WHO says. A report to be published later this year will say animal studies confirm findings that pollutants can impair lung growth in the womb. Alex Kirby. [BBC News](#). 23 June 2004

[Fetuses Vulnerable to Air Pollution](#)

Babies in the womb are more sensitive than their mothers to health risks from air pollution, a new study finds. Holly VanScoy. [Forbes: Health](#). 29 June 2004

[New Study of New York City Residents Shows That Newborns are More Susceptible to DNA Damage from Pollution than Their Mothers](#)

A new study of the effects of combustion-related air pollutants in New York City reveals that babies in the womb are more susceptible than their mothers to DNA damage from such pollution. John Peterson & Dr. Gwen Collman. [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences \(NIEHS\)](#) 23 June 2004

[Air Pollution May Slightly Increase SIDS Risk](#)

Canadian investigators discovered that high levels of common air pollutants may cause a slight increase in the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS, by affecting infants' respiratory system, preventing them from breathing normally. Alison McCook. [Reuters Health](#), NY. 8 June 2004

[Fat children 'suffer more from air pollution'](#)

Obese children are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of air pollution than their slimmer classmates, according to a study. David Derbyshire. [London Daily Telegraph](#), England. 1 June 2004

[Respiratory Diseases 5th Most Cause of Death](#)

Respiratory diseases were counted as the fifth most remarkable cause of death in the 2002 report. This fact suggests a significant implication related to environmental pollution. Cho Seong-kwan. [Chosun Ilbo](#), Korea. 8 June 2004

[Asthma: nearly an epidemic](#)

From 1980 to 1996, cases of asthma in the population almost doubled, 5 million children have it, and researcher say it's not going away. Worldwide, the number of asthmatics is expected to jump from 300 million to 400 million in the next 20 years. Dennis O'Brien. [The Baltimore Sun](#). June 28, 2004

[Aral catastrophe recorded in DNA](#)

Fresh fears have been raised about the health of populations living near the shrinking Aral Sea in central Asia. A new study has now found high

levels of DNA damage that could explain the region's abnormally high cancer rates. David Shukman. [BBC News](#). 9 June 2004

b) Indoor air pollution:

[Gas Stoves Tied to Breathing Woes in Kids](#)

Gas cooking in the home may raise young children's risk for respiratory illness, according to a study in the journal - Archives of Disease in Childhood. Robert Preidt. [Forbes: Health](#). 23 June 2004

[Kids' asthma fear over gas cookers](#)

Children living in homes with gas cookers could be at risk of asthma and bronchitis. Lorraine Fisher. [Daily Record](#), UK. 21 June 2004

[Children's lung and brain development most at risk from toxic substances, report finds](#)

The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) and Pollution Probe have released a new shortlist of Canadian "substances of concern" for children's health. The new report classifies toxic substances in lists that make it easier to understand the substances' effects on children's health. Kathleen Cooper, [Canadian Environmental Law Association](#), Toronto. 30 June 2004

[Improving Indoor Air Quality During High Pollution Season](#)

Most people do not realize that the air in their homes can contribute to health problems, particularly during peak summer months when ozone pollution is highest. [Environment News Service \(ENS\)](#). 17 June 2004 (subscription required)

c) Outdoor air pollution:

[Car pollution threatens fetal DNA](#)

Pollutants emitted from motor vehicles in New York City cause more damage to fetal DNA than previously thought, according to a study released yesterday. Nia-Malika Henderson. [New York Newsday](#). 24 June 2004

[Local study suggests traffic, asthma link](#)

Anchorage children living near busy streets have a greater chance of being diagnosed with asthma than those in lower-traffic areas, according to a new study by a local doctor, Mary Ellen Gordian. Ann Potempa. [Anchorage Daily News](#). 18 June 2004

[Nearly 100 Million in U.S. Breathing Particulates -EPA](#)

Almost 100 million people in 21 U.S. states breathe unhealthy levels of tiny particles spewed by coal-burning power plants, cars and factories, the Environmental Protection Agency said on Tuesday. Chris Baltimore. [Reuters](#), NY. 29 June 2004

[Calif. officials recommend tight new ground-level ozone standard](#)

The staff of the Air Resources Board (ARB) and the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) are currently reviewing the scientific literature regarding the health effects of ozone (O₃) and are considering revisions to the Ozone Ambient Air Quality

Standard based on the literature review. Draft Staff Report. The department of the California Environmental Protection Agency. 21 June 2004

[Pataki Introduces Clean School Bus Legislation](#)

Introduced by Governor George Pataki, landmark legislation would significantly reduce school bus emissions, help protect millions of school children throughout New York State and encourage school districts to purchase clean-fueled school buses. John Toscano. The Western Queens Gazette, NY. 2 June 2004

[Bus mandate has problems](#)

Gov. George Pataki makes a very good point when he urges local districts to consider buying environmentally safe buses. But local districts should not be demanded to do so, unless the state is prepared to take on the costs. Poughkeepsie Journal, New York. Editorial, 3 June 2004 (article archived – for a copy, please e-mail heca@nyo.unep.org)

[In Malaysia: Schools to close if haze gets worse, says minister](#)

Madam Irma Abdullah says she smells trees burning in Sumatra when she takes a deep breath. The choking smoke forces her to turn on the air-conditioning to protect herself and her 16-month-old son from the smog's effects. Reme Ahmad. The Straits Times. 24 June 2004 (article archived – for a copy, please e-mail heca@nyo.unep.org)

d) Climate Change:

[Experts link asthma to global warming](#)

New research suggests that global warming could lead to more people in Britain suffering the misery of asthma. The analysis of the study presented in the article showed a strong link between indoor humidity and asthma rates among children. John Innes. The Scotsman. 21 June 2004

[Asthma linked to humidity](#)

A study of almost 670,000 children has found a clear link between indoor humidity and asthma rates in Western Europe. Health Today, Newcastle. 21 June 2004

[Climate Tied to Asthma, Eczema Rates in Kids](#)

Changes in weather may influence rates of asthma and eczema in children, says a study in the journal - Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Robert Preidt. BMJ Specialist Journals, news release. 21 June 2004

[Cause and Effect: Dry Weather Is Asthma's Enemy](#)

Does climate play a role in asthma? A large-scale study involving children in 50 countries has found that asthma rates may be affected by climate, and that the skin condition eczema may also be affected. Eric Nagourney. The New York Times: Health. 29 June 2004 (subscription required)

~~ CHEMICALS ~~

a) General:

[Children's brain development affected by chemicals](#)

The brain development of many children in Europe today has been harmed by man-made chemicals. Details of studies showing that chemicals are seriously impacting on children's intelligence are highlighted by WWF. Worldwide Fund, UK. 2 June 2004

[Children's brain development harmed by chemicals](#)

Man-made chemicals have harmed the brain development of many children today in Europe. Details of studies are highlighted in a new WWF report. Worldwide Fund for Nature, Europe. 2 June 2004

[Chemicals 'affect child brains'](#)

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) warns substances in everyday goods such as TVs, computers and car seats can affect children's memory and IQ. BBC, UK. 2 June 2004

[Brain warning over chemicals](#)

The research claims that chemicals are harming the brain development of many children in Europe but laws to phase out the potentially most dangerous substances are still not in place. London Guardian, England. 2 June 2004

[Chemical danger to child growth](#)

A new report by a leading environmental campaign group has claimed that man-made chemicals common in homes are seriously affecting children's brain development. James Reynolds. Edinburgh Scotsman, Scotland. 2 June 2004

[Too many products carry chemical danger to children](#)

Leading high street stores are still stocking a range of everyday products on their shelves containing chemicals which pose a health risk to millions, according to a new report. James Reynolds. Edinburgh Scotsman, Scotland. 1 June 2004

[Common chemicals hurt kids' brains](#)

According to the environmental group WWF International, man-made chemicals are harming the intelligence of children in Europe, damaging their memory and IQ levels. It called on the European Union to take a tough approach to safety regulation. Straits Times, Singapore. 3 June 2004 (article archived – for a copy, please e-mail heca@nyo.unep.org)

[Children at risk from cosmetics](#)

Children are at greater risk of cancers and fertility problems in later life because of the growing use of their cosmetics and toiletries, health experts are warning. Severin Carrell, The Independent. 30 May 2004.

[Artificial food colourings make children hyper](#)

Artificial food colourings and preservatives have a significant impact on hyperactivity levels in very young children, new research has found. Paul McGinn. Irish Medical Times. 18 June 2004

[Rocket Fuel Contamination in California Milk](#)

Milk from cows raised in some parts of California may expose infants and children to more of a toxic rocket fuel chemical than is considered safe by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), according to unreleased tests. Executive Summary. [Environmental Working Group \(EWG\)](#). 22 June 2004

[Rocket fuel found in milk in California - Not clear if amount imperils children](#)

A toxic chemical in rocket fuel has been detected in California's milk supply, although environmentalists and toxicologists disagree over whether the levels are high enough to pose a health threat to infants and young children. Glen Martin. [San Francisco Chronicle](#). 22 June 2004

[Study finds toxic rocket fuel chemical in milk from Calif. cows](#)

Young children and pregnant women who drink milk from California cows may be exposed to unsafe levels of a toxic chemical used in rocket fuel, according to a new study by an environmental group. Terence Chea. [Canadian Press](#), Canada. 22 June 2004

b) Lead:

[Pressure mounts on Africa to phase out leaded fuel](#)

Air pollution in most African cities may be lower than in other cities in the developed countries and in Latin America, but African leaders are now conditioned to phase-out toxic leaded fuel in the next 18 months. African governments are under intense pressure from the international community led by the World Bank, WHO and UNEP to replace the fuel with unleaded fuel. Benson Kathuri. [The Financial Standard](#). 29 June 2004

[New research: even low levels of lead highly dangerous](#)

A growing body of research suggests that childhood lead poisoning is far more harmful and its effects on society more profound than was commonly understood just a few years ago. Joan Lowy. [Scripps Howard News Service](#). 30 June 2004

[Researchers: Likely link between crime and lead exposure](#)

Lead exposure in early childhood may have played an important role in the national epidemic of violent crime in the late 20th century and the equally spectacular decline in crime rates of the past decade, some researchers contend. Joan Lowy. [Scripps Howard News Service](#). 30 June 2004

[Lead paint law too strict? NO](#)

The real estate lobby has always opposed regulations to protect children from lead paint, so it is predictable that the landlords' representatives are conducting an active campaign to discredit the new lead poisoning prevention law before it takes effect in August. Pete Sikora. [New York Daily News](#). 20 June 2004

[Lead paint law too strict? YES](#)

The new lead paint law applies to the city's 1.6 million pre-1960 apartments, whether or not they are known to contain lead paint. Its

good intentions - protecting children's health - will aggravate housing decay, which creates health risks and drags down neighborhoods. Michael D. Lappin. New York Daily News. 20 June 2004

c) Pesticides:

[Pesticides Affect Child Development in India](#)

A large-scale study has found evidence that children living in regions of intensive pesticide use may be at risk for impaired mental development. Pesticide Action Network, North America (PANNA). 22 June 2004

[Two New Warnings on Pesticides & Chemicals](#)

A strong warning on the risks of exposure to pesticides was issued in April. The following month, medical specialists identified the number of untested chemicals in the environment as "a serious threat to children and to Man's survival." Pesticide Action Network, North America (PANNA). 15 June 2004

d) Mercury:

[Small fish for healthy babies](#)

Japanese researchers have shown for the first time that when pregnant women eat fish, they can increase their fetuses' exposure to harmful methylmercury as well as beneficial omega-3 fatty acids. Rebecca Renner. Environmental Science & Technology. 10 June 2004

[Physician Groups Release 1st Guides to Safe Fish Consumption Written by Doctors](#)

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) and the Association of Reproductive Health Professional (ARHP) today released Fish Consumption to Promote Good Health and Minimize Contaminants: A Quick Reference Guide for Clinicians and Healthy Fish, Healthy Families. Elizabeth Rose. Environmental Media Services, Washington, DC. 18 June 2004

[Senate Panel OKs Bill on Vaccine](#)

The California Senate Committee on Health and Human Services voted 10-to-2 on Wednesday in favor of a bill that would ban thimerosal, a compound that includes ethyl mercury, from early childhood vaccines. Myron Levin. Los Angeles Times, CA. 24 June 2004

e) Fire retardants:

[Fire retardants' effects arouse safety debate](#)

Researchers are discovering that the fire retardants present in everyday household are rapidly accumulating at alarming levels in people's blood and mothers' breast milk. But firm data on human health effects remain elusive, and epidemiological studies are only now underway. Stephanie Ebbert. The Boston Globe: Health and Science News. 14 June 2004

[Flame retardant in breast milk raises concern](#)

The highest amounts of a compound used as a flame retardant in computer casings and household furniture were detected in the milk of

nursing U.S. mothers. It may be contributing to children's health problems. Martin Mittelstaedt. The Globe and Mail. 7 June 2004

[Danger lurks: Flame retardants need attention](#)

Flame retardants, designed to slow the spread of fire, are nestled in beds, couches, computers and cell phones. But lately, scientists have discovered these chemicals in breast milk, household dust and dietary supplements containing cod liver oil. Julie Deardorff. Chicago Tribune, Illinois. 4 June 2004

[Anti-Fire Chemical Spurs Toxic Fears in Arctic](#)

Chemicals widely used as flame retardants in homes have been found in polar bears and birds in the Arctic, raising fears that they could pose a health hazard, Norwegian scientists said yesterday. Alister Doyle. Reuters News Service, Oslo. 1 June 2004

[This Is the Toxic Substance You Can't Avoid](#)

Scientists have discovered that toxic flame-retardants are being spread by an array of store-bought foods as well as dust inside homes and offices and are building up at a rapid pace in people's bodies throughout the United States and Canada. Marla Cone. Los Angeles Times, CA 20 June 2004 (subscription needed)

[Breast milk alarm](#)

The breast milk of Canadian women contains the second-highest levels in the world of a compound used as a flame retardant in computer casings and household furniture, linked to learning difficulties, memory impairment and alterations in thyroid hormone levels. Joe Smith. The Calgary Sun, CP. 8 June 2004

~~ **WATER AND SANITATION** ~~

[Global sewage torrent harms young](#)

The amount of raw sewage entering the river Ganges every minute is 1.1 million litres, WHO says. Alex Kirby. BBC News. 23 June 2004

~~ **MISCELLANIOUS** ~~

[Prof warns of environmental health hazards](#)

Embryos and children are far more sensitive to various substances and environmental factors than adults, Prof. Mori said in a speech he delivered in Yokohama at the general meeting of the All Japan Health and Natural Foods Association. Mikiko Miyakawa. The Daily Yomiuri. 21 June 2004 (article archived – for a copy, please e-mail heca@nyo.unep.org)

[Virtual island way to green life](#)

A hi-tech attempt to stimulate the next generation to think and act green has been launched by two European groups. The computer game, aimed at 10 to 14-year-olds, shows the impacts of daily choices on human health, especially children's. Alex Kirby. BBC News. 24 June 2004

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