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~~ Healthy Environments for Children Alliance ~~

HECANET August 2004

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\* To reflect activities in the next issue of HECANET send information to [heca@nyo.unep.org](mailto:heca@nyo.unep.org)

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#### ~ ARTICLES ~

*Children's environmental health* issues received wide coverage in August, with an overriding emphasis on the effects of specific chemicals and air pollutants. This emphasis may in part be due to the fact that the majority of articles reported appear in the North American and European media. We would therefore be grateful if relevant articles from other regions and countries could be forwarded to [heca@nyo.unep.org](mailto:heca@nyo.unep.org) so that we can reflect them in upcoming issues of HECANET. A great deal of attention was accorded in the US national and local press to an environmental coalition's analysis of a survey by the US/EPA on mercury levels in the nation's lakes and reservoirs. The focus of other new studies that were reported in the press included: the relationship between benzene and childhood leukemia, the vulnerability of fetuses to combustion pollutants, and the effects of air pollutants and temperature variations on child mortality. Summaries of articles grouped under the following themes appear below, with links to their full texts:

(1) Air Pollution (a) General, (b) Indoor air pollution, (c) Outdoor air pollution

(2) Chemicals: (a) General, (b) Lead, (c) Pesticides, (d) Mercury

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**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.

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## ~ EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES ~

### ~~ HECA Developments: ~~

1) *The Healthy Environments for Children Alliance* is currently HECA extends many thanks to all those who submitted applications. After receiving high quality applications from all regions, the deadline has now passed for the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance request for applications (RFA) procedure, and applications are no longer being accepted. A review committee composed of technical experts, together with representatives from a range of stakeholder organizations is being set up to evaluate the proposals.

HECA is also working to improve our collective understanding of country policies, activities and capacities as they pertain to children's environmental health. This will be done largely through a questionnaire survey, which is currently under development. Anyone who wishes to contribute to this effort should contact Dr Yasmin von Schirnding, Manager HECA at [vonschirnding@who.int](mailto:vonschirnding@who.int).

### ~~ Children's Environmental Health Indicators Initiative ~~

2) The White Paper 'From Theory to Action: Implementing the WSSD [Global Initiative on Children's Environmental Health Indicators](#)' has been published. The roadmap outlines the operational and technical processes for implementing the development, collection and reporting of indicators at the regional and country level. This publication will officially be

launched at a workshop in Costa Rica on Children's Environmental Health indicators organized by PAHO on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2004 and this document is available in English and Spanish on the WHO Children's Environmental Health website ([www.who.int/ceh/publications](http://www.who.int/ceh/publications)). The main objectives of the Costa Rica meeting are: i) To standardize concepts and criteria on children's health and environmental indicators; ii) To select priority environmental health indicators to monitor the environment and health of children in participating countries and; iii) To establish a commitment to the participating countries to systematically collect data and information on selected indicators. Such information will serve as the basis for the formulation of timely policies and decision-making that contributes to achieving healthy environments for the children.

~~ **Conference on Children's Health and the Environment** ~~

3) *The second annual [Mid-Atlantic Conference on Children's Health and the Environment](#)*, to be held at George Washington University on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2004, will address clinically important issues in children's health as the environment affects them. Children of all ages, including those in the fetal stages of development, can be affected by environmental hazards such as lead, air pollution in schools and homes, pesticides and asbestos. Exposure to these substances via air, water, food or soil can have a significant impact on the health of children. This course is designed for various health professionals including pediatricians, family medicine physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, school nurses, public health professionals and other allied health professionals. For more information contact, Nonye Harvey at [ehceu@gwumc.edu](mailto:ehceu@gwumc.edu)

~~ **Symposium on Children's Health as Impacted by Environmental Contaminants** ~~

4) *The Children's Environmental Health Institute* will host the 2004 [Biennial Scientific Symposium on Children's Health as Impacted by Environmental Contaminants](#) on September 24-25, 2004. It will be sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Texas Medical Association, the Lower Colorado River Authority and the Environmental Protection Agency.

\* *The event* is scheduled for September 24-25, 2004 at the Lower Colorado River Authority's Natural Science Center at McKinney Roughs Nature Park in Austin, Texas. The Scientific Symposium will provide an opportunity for physicians and other health professionals to learn how to protect children from health risks related to their environment. Targeted sessions for school board members/administrators and administrators of children's facilities will also be provided. For more information about the symposium, contact Sarah Jones, [sarah.jones@cehi.org](mailto:sarah.jones@cehi.org)

~~ **International Network on Children's Health, Environment and Safety (INCHES) Project: CHEST** ~~

5) [INCHES](#) started a project on making a Training Manual on children's environmental health called CHEST (Children's Health, Environment and Safety Training). There will be a first workshop meeting in September in Leiden, the Netherlands.

This workshop will collect existing material on education on (children's) environmental health. The project is partly funded by the EU. Additional funding is still needed. If you have any material that could be useful in this aspect, you can let the INCHES Secretariat know. Anyone who wants to participate on behalf of their organization is free to join us on his/her own costs. Later on there will be workshops on the training methods and on the contents of the manual. In the second year we will conduct pilot training sessions. You can contact Peter van den Hazel ([pvdhazel@inter.nl.net](mailto:pvdhazel@inter.nl.net)).

**~~ The Healthy Children Conference" Chernivtsy, Ukraine ~~**

6) "*The Healthy Children Conference*" will take place on 30 September – 1 October, 2004 in Chernivtsy (Ukraine) at the Bucovinian Medical Academy Conference Center. The Conference Program Committee invites abstracts. The conference will provide several opportunities for presentations by participants and poster sessions. Topics include: children health, growth and development; problems of adaptation newborns and infants; developmental nutrition guidelines; and environmental health of children. Please contact: Head of Department of Developmental Pediatrics, Bukovinian State Medical Academy, Professor Yuriy Nechitailo E-mail - [chernivtsi2002@yandex.ru](mailto:chernivtsi2002@yandex.ru), [pediatr2@msa.cv.ua](mailto:pediatr2@msa.cv.ua) [Bukovinian State Medical Academy On-line](#)

**~~ Policy Interpretation Network on Children's Health and Environment (PINCHE) Meetings ~~**

7) [PINCHE Meetings](#): Workpackages 1 to 6 will meet in Prague on 19 and 20 October 2004. In these meetings the evaluation process of the literature will be discussed, as well as the further process of coming to policy recommendations for the selected topics. The meetings are hosted by Dr. Radim Sram and will take place in the Institute of Experimental Medicine in Prague.

\* *The meetings* are open for all interested people. The Workpackage meetings will be planned in two parallel sessions, starting at Tuesday 19 October at 1 pm. More practical information will follow on the [PINCHE web-site](#).

\* *For more information* on PINCHE and its activities, please see the [PINCHE newsletter](#).

**~~ Philippines: 'train the trainers' children's environmental health workshop ~~**

8) *The Department* of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of the Philippines will hold a 'train the trainers' workshop on children's environmental health in the Philippines on November 28-30, 2004. It is part of a series of meetings to be held in the Philippines which begins with the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety Asia Pacific Regional Meeting November 22-23, followed by the 4th International Meeting of the Asia Pacific Association of Medical Toxicology (APAMT) hosted by the Philippine Society of Clinical and Occupational Toxicology from November 24-26 and then the CEH 'train the trainer's' workshop. In all these meetings with emphasis will be on children's chemical safety, and healthy settings including basic rights of the child to chemical free, safe and clean drinking water.

**~~ The Prantik Medical and Research Centre, India – Recent Activities ~~**

9) *The Prantik Medical and Research Centre*, India has been associated with WHO activities; especially as coordinators for 7th April - World Health Day - activities. Last year on World Health Day the Centre encouraged children to participate in a sit and draw competition. The theme was "My world". All the paintings were displayed in the internet. The Centre also produced small booklets with articles and photographs of Santiniketan, informing people how it is being transformed into a 'concrete jungle', taking away even playgrounds.

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## ~ ARTICLES ~

### ~~ AIR POLLUTION ~~

#### a) **General:**

##### [Fetuses very susceptible to combustion pollutants](#)

A study undertaken by the Columbia Center of Children's Environmental Health published in the July issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* demonstrates that the fetus is more susceptible to DNA damage from combustion-related pollutants than previously thought. Paul D. Thacker, [Environmental Science and Technology](#), 4 August 2004

##### [Death rates for young children are related seasonal levels of particulate air pollution and cold temperatures](#)

Seasonal variations in death rates for young children are related to high levels of particulate air pollution and cold temperatures during the winter months, and to high levels of particulate pollutants and nitrogen dioxide during the summer months, according to a Spanish study in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. [News-Medical.Net](#). 15 August 2004.

##### [Air pollution and temperature variations affect child mortality](#)

The results of a Spanish study provide new insights into how daily environmental conditions at ground level might affect health in infants and young children. High total suspended particles levels are a hazard to children in both the winter and summer months, while temperature is a factor mainly on cold days. [WebIndia123.com](#). 16 August 2004.

##### [The asthma attack](#)

Is George Bush against black children breathing? In promoting his new book, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has loosed this assault: "One out of every four black children in New York now has asthma. Those asthma attacks are triggered by pollution from power plants, which George Bush let off the hook." Rich Lowry. [Townhall.com](#). 10 August 2004.

#### b) **Indoor air pollution:**

##### [How to help children breathe easier at school](#)

Parents need to take steps to protect their children from allergy and asthma triggers they may encounter at school. Dust mites,

chalk dust, pollen, molds, exercise and animal dander from class pets or on other student's clothes are common allergy and asthma triggers in schools. Robert Preidt. [HealthDayNews](#). 20 August 2004.

**c) Outdoor air pollution:**

[Group Urges EPA for More Pollution Cuts](#)

If the government required deeper cuts in air pollution from power plants, 3,000 lives would be saved and 140,000 children would avoid asthma and other respiratory ailments, a new study said. The EPA Administrator has said new rules would save 13,000 lives and lead to 860,000 fewer asthma/respiratory cases in children. John Heilprin. [Associated Press](#). 18 August 2004.

[Strong Power Plant Rule Would Prevent 3,000 Premature Deaths](#)

The Bush administration's proposal to cut power plant emissions does not go far enough to protect public health, according to a study by an advocacy organization. A stronger rule would prevent an additional 3,000 premature deaths and 140,000 fewer childhood asthma cases, the organization says. [Environment News Service](#) (subscription required). 19 August 2004.

[White House's new clean-air rules have hidden hazards](#)

The Bush administration's controversial proposal for regulating mercury emissions from power plants would allow continued, unregulated releases of arsenic, a known human carcinogen; lead, which can cause childhood learning disabilities at low doses; and 60 other toxic material, according to a new study. Don Hopey. [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#). 27 August 2004.

[Bad summer air may hit more U.S. cities](#)

The number of summer days when air quality fails federal health standards could nearly double by mid-century for people living in 15 eastern U.S. cities, medical experts said in a new study. Unhealthy air means that children will have to spend more time indoors, with more serious consequences for asthmatic children. [Reuters](#). 6 August 2004

~~ **CHEMICALS** ~~

**a) General:**

[Fuel Stations May Pose Child Cancer Risk -Study](#)

French scientists who carried out a study of more than 500 infants found that a child whose home was near a fuel station or vehicle-repair garage was four times as likely to develop leukemia as a child whose home was further away. [Reuters](#). 18 August 2004

[Does benzene cause childhood leukemia?](#)

Preliminary research suggests that benzene emissions from gas stations and auto repair shops may quadruple the risk of leukemia in children. But the authors of the study, which appears in the September issue of 'Occupational and Environmental Medicine', caution against over interpreting the results. Amanda Gardner. [HealthDayNews](#). 19 August 2004.

### [Leukemia rates high for kids near gas stations](#)

Children who live in close proximity to gas stations and auto body shops have a dramatically higher rate of leukemia, according to a new study. The research provides powerful evidence that the common childhood cancer may be caused by exposure to the chemical benzene. Toronto Globe and Mail, Ontario. 20 August 2004. [Free registration]

### [Cleaning chemicals linked to asthma in young children](#)

Fumes given off by cleaning products and solvents in the home may be a cause of asthma in young children, according to new research. The study showed a marked increase in asthma risk among those children with higher levels of volatile organic compounds in their homes. Sarah Boseley. The Guardian, London. 26 August 2004.

### [Cleaners, Solvents May Raise Kids' Asthma Risk](#)

The fumes emitted from home cleaning products and solvents may increase the risk of childhood asthma, according to a new Australian study. The authors concluded that their study, though small, supports their theory that exposure to indoor pollutants early in life may be an important factor in later development of asthma. Robert Preidt. HealthDayNews. 26 August 2004.

### [Toxins Accumulate in Arctic Peoples, Animals, Study Says](#)

The Arctic region's indigenous peoples and animal predators are reportedly among the most chemically contaminated on Earth. A study by Canadian researchers at Quebec's Laval University showed that Inuit mothers carried about five times as much PCB contamination as other Canadians. Sharon Guynup. National Geographic Channel. 27 August 2004.

### [DuPont, Now in the Frying Pan](#)

Evidence suggests that some Teflon constituents, known to cause cancer and other problems in animals, may be making people sick. In the 1980's, a DuPont study of female workers exposed to the substance found that two out of seven women gave birth to babies with facial defects. Amy Cortese. New York Times. 8 August 2004. [Article needs to be purchased].

### [Playground Poison](#)

A third of the playgrounds in Central Park expose kids to potentially dangerous levels of arsenic, an investigation has found. Pressure-treated wood at 7 of 20 play areas tested positive for arsenic at levels above what experts consider safe, and two others had lesser levels of the cancer-causing chemical. Brad Hamilton. New York Post. 15 August 2004.

### **b) Lead:**

#### [The Secret Life of Lead](#)

Lead is not only a problem in drinking water. Though lead paint in American homes was outlawed in the 1970s, it is still present in older homes, and it is still putting pregnant women and children at risk. Living on Earth has been following the

work of researchers who look at ways lead can affect children. Cynthia Graber. [Living on Earth](#). 27 August 2004.

### [Cleaning Up Lead Contamination Along Mexican-U.S. Border](#)

An inter-governmental program has begun to clean up toxic industrial waste that for a decade has been a presence in the lives of 10,000 people near Tijuana. The children of Chilpancingo, near the U.S. border and the Pacific coast, were poisoned with lead or born with terrible defects, including anencephaly (without a brain). Katherine Stapp. [Tierramérica](#). 3 August 2004.

### [Lead Out](#)

Twelve African nations have committed to phase out leaded petroleum fuel, and nine countries have already switched entirely to unleaded fuel. People exposed to lead often suffer brain and kidney damage. Children are especially susceptible to nervous system damage. SciDev.Net. [Earth Island Institute](#). Autumn 2004.

### [Lead Paint Law Starting Today](#)

New York City's controversial new lead law kicks in today, forcing landlords to test for and remove tainted paint in apartments with young kids. The new law requires an owner to remove lead-based paint from a flat that is home to a child younger than 6. Amy Sacks. [Detoxamin News](#). / Brian Boyd. [Newsday New York](#). 2 August 2004.

### [Protecting Baby: Calcium in pregnancy reduces lead exposure](#)

The danger of lead poisoning is well known, but how best to protect infants from its effects hasn't been established. By taking calcium supplements during pregnancy, a mother can significantly reduce the lead exposure of her fetus. Carrie Lock. [Science News](#). 14 August 2004. [Subscription required].

### [Lead woes years in the making](#)

As Seattle Public Schools wrestles with a multimillion-dollar problem -- how to get potentially dangerous levels of lead out of its drinking water -- one thing is clear: It's a problem that was years in the making. Deborah Bach. [Seattle Post Intelligencer](#). 10 August 2004.

### [School's drinking fountains shut down](#)

Officials have shut down a Durham elementary school's drinking fountains after a test of the school's drinking water found low, but potentially unsafe, levels of lead. Michael Petrocelli. [Herald-Sun](#), North Carolina. 3 August 2004.

### [Officials see danger of lead poisoning in Mexican seasonings](#)

Four seasonings imported from Mexico contained levels of lead that pose a potential danger to children, state officials warned. Cheryl Clark. [San Diego Union-Tribune](#). 5 August 2004.

### **c) Pesticides:**

#### [UND researchers studying pesticide impact on children](#)

University of North Dakota researchers have launched a study to find out whether pesticide exposure has an impact on children's growth. The results will be published and shared with farm families throughout the state. Associated Press. 31 August 2004

#### [Tragedy of Child Labour](#)

Nearly 4 lakh children, mostly girls between seven and fourteen years of age, toil for 14-16 hours a day in cottonseed production units across the country. In Andhra Pradesh, which accounts for 60% of the hybrid cottonseed production, girls are constantly exposed to poisonous pesticides like endosulfan. Sarika Jain Antony. Navhind Times, India. 6 August 2004.

#### [Toxic playgrounds?](#)

Despite an agreement with the EPA to phase out the use of pressure-treated lumber in playground equipment, the pesticide-treated wood continues to be sold. Unwitting consumers could use this wood for decks or backyard planters, where the pesticide can leach into the soil or get on children's hands. Jennifer Lacey. ParentsKnow.com, New York. August 2004.

### **d) Mercury:**

#### [Coal Takes Heavy Human Toll: Some 25,100 U.S. Deaths from Coal Use Largely Preventable](#)

Startling new research shows that one out of six women of childbearing age in the US may have blood mercury concentrations high enough to damage a developing fetus. 630,000 of the 4 million babies born in the US each year are at risk of neurological damage due to exposure to dangerous mercury levels in the womb. Janet Larsen. Earth Policy Institute. 24 August 2004.

#### [EPA mercury plan aims to help children and women, sidestep coal politics](#)

New controls for cutting mercury emissions from power plants will aim to protect children and pregnant women and create "a level playing field" for coal-producing regions, the head of the EPA said. About 8% of U.S. women of childbearing age have enough mercury in their blood to put a fetus at risk, according to the EPA. John Heilprin. Associated Press. 10 August 2004.

#### [EPA Study Finds Mercury in Every Fish Sample from America's Lakes](#)

In recent U.S. EPA tests of fish caught from America's lakes, every fish sample tested was contaminated with mercury, 55 percent contained mercury levels that exceed EPA's "safe" limit for women of childbearing age, and 76 percent exceeded the safe limit for children under age three, according to a new report. Emily Figdor/Liz Hitchcock. Clear the Air. 3 August 2004.

#### [High mercury found in fish from lakes](#)

Fish from lakes and reservoirs sampled by federal researchers were contaminated with mercury, and most exceeded federal exposure limits for young children and women of childbearing age, a study by an environmental advocacy coalition said. An EPA official responded that the study misconstrued EPA data. Ira Dreyfuss. Associated Press. 4 August 2004.

#### [A Study Finds Mercury Levels in Fish Exceed U.S. Standards](#)

More than half the fish in the nation's lakes and reservoirs have levels of mercury that exceed government standards for women of child-bearing age and children, according to an environmental coalition's analysis of a survey by the Environmental Protection Agency. Michael Janofsky. New York Times. 4 August 2004 [Article needs to be purchased].

### [Mercury threat keeps rising](#)

Fish contamination shows need for federal emission standards. Federal tests show that more than half of the fish in America's lakes and reservoirs contain levels of mercury so high that they're unsafe for consumption by children and by women of child-bearing age, according to a new report by Clear the Air. Herald Tribune, Southwest Florida. 9 August 2004.

### [EPA should move faster on mercury](#)

Women, children and the Environmental Protection Agency should take note. The need to pay attention to the amount of mercury in fish may be greater than they realize. Using EPA data from an ongoing study, a coalition of environmental groups on Tuesday called for stricter rules on power plants' mercury emissions. Editorial Board. Seattle Post-Intelligencer. 5 August 2004.

### [High mercury risk in fish raises alarm](#)

Mercury is turning up in fish in Washington State's remote lakes and reservoirs at levels that could be harmful to women and children, and more than half the fish tested nationwide also are contaminated, according to a study by an environmental coalition. Lisa Stiffler. Seattle Post Intelligencer. 4 August 2004.

### [Study: High mercury in northern N.E. fish](#)

Almost 90% of fish taken from Maine waterways and tested for mercury as part of a federal study contained unsafe levels. The EPA study show that 89% of samples collected contained mercury levels above the limit considered safe for women of childbearing age. AP. The Union Leader, New Hampshire. 5 August 2004. [Article needs to be purchased].

### [Mercury levels raise alarm](#)

Fish at Lone Star Lake exceed federal standards for safe consumption by young children and mothers, reflecting a trend of rising contamination levels in lakes across Kansas, home to one of the biggest mercury polluters in the nation. Joel Mathis. Journal-World, Kansas. 6 August 2004.

### [Groups Chide U.S. on Mercury Regulations](#)

Environmentalists and two Maryland congressmen chastised the Bush administration for proposed regulations they said will not do enough to reduce mercury contamination of Maryland rivers, lakes and the Chesapeake Bay. Mercury is a toxin that interferes with development of the brain and the nervous system in fetuses. Tom Stuckey. Associated Press. 19 August 2004.

### [Fish sample shows unsafe mercury levels](#)

Fish sampled in more than 100 lakes in Michigan, including a handful in Metro Detroit, were contaminated with levels of mercury that in most cases exceeded safe levels for women of childbearing age and young children, and according to a report released by a coalition of environmental advocacy groups. Gene Schabath. The Detroit News. 9 August 2004.

### [Drug Firm Fights Ban on Vaccine Preservative](#)

Pharmaceutical giant Aventis-Pasteur is trying to rally opposition to state legislation that would bar use of a mercury-based

preservative in vaccines administered to infants and pregnant women in California. Myron Levin. Los Angeles Times. 6 August 2004.

[Vaccine row as NHS continues poison jabs](#)

The government's announcement of the withdrawal of child vaccinations containing mercury came under immediate fire yesterday as it emerged that at least four more vaccines containing the poisonous metal will remain in use by the National Health Service. James Kirkup/Hilary Marshall. The Scotsman. 10 August 2004.

**e) Fire retardants:**

[Less of contaminant found in wild salmon PCB-like chemical at higher levels in farm-grown fish](#)

A PCB-like chemical used as a flame retardant has been discovered in commercially sold farmed salmon. We know from lab animals that the effects of disruption in behavior, learning and memory are similar to PCBs. PBDEs appear to affect the hormone systems, important to the development of young children. Jane Kay. San Francisco Chronicle. 10 August 2004.

[Traces of fire retardant found in wild and farmed salmon](#)

Traces of industrial-strength fire retardant have turned up in wild and farm-raised salmon around the world, a study released Tuesday said. PBDEs can harm neurological development and function in babies and young children - just like mercury and PCBs. Associated Press. Billings Gazette, Montana. 11 August 2004.

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