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~~ **Healthy Environments for Children Alliance**

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**HECANET** July 2004  
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~ A service provided for HECA by [UNEP](#) ~  
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~ **EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES** ~

\* 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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- (5) Symposium on Children's Health as Impacted by Environmental Contaminants, 24-25 September 2004
- (6) Policy Interpretation Network on Children's Health and Environment (PINCHE) meetings, Prague, 19-20 October 2004

~ **ARTICLES** ~

*Children's* environmental health issues received wide coverage in July, particularly in the North American and European national press. Articles dealt with newly released studies and findings covering a range of issue areas including: birth defects and the environment, the health effects of the emission of industrial chemicals, lead in toy jewelry, pesticide stockpiles in Africa, and pesticide levels on fruit. In addition to covering national (and sometimes international) stories, local media outlets devoted significant attention to environmental threats in the school environment, such as lead in drinking water, indoor air quality, use of pesticides and school bus emissions. 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

(3) **Water and Sanitation**

(4) **Miscellaneous**

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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: Series of Issue Briefs** ~~

**a)** *The Healthy Environments for Children Alliance* is preparing a series of issue briefs, encompassing the key risks that children currently face in their environments. The briefs aim to provide a global overview of the issue in question, highlighting the situation in different regions of the world. They also intend to address the physiological, behavioural and developmental vulnerabilities of children and document the health impacts on children. Most importantly, the briefs outline action that can be taken at different levels, by policy-makers and other stakeholders to better address the special needs of children. The briefs that have been developed to date address injuries, air pollution, chemicals, lead, pesticides, water and sanitation, and vector-borne diseases.

\* *These briefs* are in different stages of development, but will be posted on the HECA website in the near future. Anyone interested in reviewing them or contributing to them should contact Dr. Yasmin von Schirnding at [vonschirnding@who.int](mailto:vonschirnding@who.int).

~~ **News from WHO on Water, Sanitation and Health** ~~

**a)** *Launch* of the WHO Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality. The third edition will be launched in September at the IWA biennial congress in Marrakech.

**b)** *The Symposium* on School Sanitation and Hygiene (SSHE) was held at the IRC, Delft, the Netherlands, from 8 - 10 June 2004. It was recognized that effective SSHE programmes have far-reaching effects on the community. The following key elements were put forward as a set of basic principles: scaling up with quality; policy support; partnerships; advocacy and information; capacity building; linkage to community water and sanitation initiatives. Check the following link for more information: [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sshe\\_forward/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sshe_forward/)

\* *If you* would like to be added to the WaterSanitation mailing list and receive e-mail when new documents are published please send a mail to [majordomo@who.int](mailto:majordomo@who.int) with the following command in the body of your email message and you will automatically be added: subscribe watersanitation.

~~ **Symposium at the 16th Conference of the ISEE, 1-4 August 2004, New York City** ~~

**a)** *There is* a growing need for the establishment of an information and knowledge base on health and environment to support decision-making. The Symposium will review the achievements in policy-oriented monitoring of key environmental health issues. The different frameworks of assessments as well as approaches to selection and implementation of indicators developed in different national and international efforts will be reviewed. Methods for reporting and communication of the epidemiological evidence on health - environment linkages to support public health policy will be discussed. Examples of successful application of indicators to enhance the decision-making process on urban environmental problems will be highlighted, revealing how tracking certain information has been/can be instrumental in shifts in research or policy. The challenges in reporting environmental health indicators related to the methods for quantifying health impacts will be recognized along with the limitations in existing data collection and surveillance systems. The needs for epidemiological research on

appropriate methods for risk assessment, and population health surveillance will be identified.

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

a) *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 [ehcecu@gwumc.edu](mailto:ehcecu@gwumc.edu)*

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

a) *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),*

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

a) [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 June newsletter](#).

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~ **ARTICLES** ~

~~ **AIR POLLUTION** ~~

**a) General:**

[Death toll from dirty air rising, study finds](#)

Health officials say Toronto's air, which is easily the most polluted in the country, is so dirty it is killing many residents and needs to be cleaned up. Air pollution leads to an estimated 1,700 premature deaths each year in Toronto and causes 6,000 additional hospital admissions, says a new study by the city's public health department. Martin Mittelstaedt. The Globe and Mail. 9 July 2004.

[Grant to help fight pollution, asthma](#)

Within a year, Nashua and Manchester officials plan to retrofit at least 45 school buses with new parts that will reduce the amount of pollution students, bus drivers and school staff inhale each day. Scott Brooks. Manchester Union Leader, New Hampshire. 7 July 2004.

**b) Indoor air pollution:**

[Parents rally for testing](#)

Parents and students rallied Thursday to urge administrators to conduct more air quality testing in two school buildings. Carl Hessler Jr. Norriston The Times Herald, Pennsylvania. 1 July 2004.

**c) Outdoor air pollution:**

[Danger in the air: Children are the subjects of an uncontrolled industrial emissions experiment, experts fear](#)

An increase in childhood cancers, diseases, birth defects, lower intelligence, and learning and behavioral problems could be linked to industry emissions of chemicals in North America, according to a draft report by the Commission for Environmental Co-operation. Charlie Fidelman. The National Post, Montreal. 13 July 2004.

[Auto pollution increases health risks](#)

Pollution from automobile tailpipes increases the risk of asthma, lung cancer, leukemia and other ailments, particularly in people who live near

busy roads such as interstate highways. Dan Klepal. The Cincinnati Enquirer. 29 July 2004.

[Oregon gets \\$500,000 grant to cut school bus pollution](#)

The Environmental Protection Agency has given Oregon \$500,000 to convert school buses to cleaner-burning fuel to reduce diesel emissions that can damage young lungs. Scott Maben. The Register-Guard. 1 July 2004.

~~ CHEMICALS ~~

**a) General:**

[Chemical danger](#)

Day-to-day chemicals have been blamed for recent increases in several diseases including asthma and childhood cancer. Fighting this threat means tackling some of the biggest companies in the world. But, says Robert Walgate, WHO is prepared for battle. Robert Walgate. The Lancet: Journal. 10 July 2004 (subscription required).

[Fetus at mercy of toxins](#)

Exposure to even small amounts of toxic chemicals during crucial days of fetal development can forever damage the "wiring" of the baby's brain. Charlie Fidelman. The Gazette, Montreal. 12 July 2004.

[European Environmental Rules Propel Change in U.S.](#)

When Darcy White of Raytown, Mo., chose to breast-feed her baby daughter, she learned, after randomly participating in a study, that her breast milk carried unusually high levels of the chemicals. Otto Pohl. The New York Times: Science. 6 July 2004 (subscription required).

[Fathers' pollutant exposure ups kids' brain tumor risk](#)

Children fathered by men who have been exposed to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) primarily through tobacco smoke, occupational exposure, and air pollution have increased odds of developing brain tumors, researchers report. Reuters Health, New York. 12 July 2004.

[Chemicals, aggression linked](#)

Researchers have discovered that endocrine disrupters not only delay the development of the nervous system and cognitive functions of mammals, but also cause abnormal behavior. Masaharu Asaba. Daily Yomiuri. 10 July 2004.

[Cancer Spreads Like Wildfire In Iraq](#)

Cancer and birth defects have been spreading like wildfire in Iraq since the 1991 US-led Gulf War, prompting doctors to describe them as the Iraqi version of flu. Depleted uranium (DU) used by the United States and its allies against Iraq has taken its toll on around 120,000 to 140,000 Iraqis, according to the latest estimates released by the Iraqi health ministry. Central Daylight Time. 28 July 2004.

[Pollutants posed small cancer risks, might have affected unborn babies in terrorist attack on World Trade Center](#)

An estimated 11,000 tons of fine particles with diameters less than 2.5 microns were released as a result of the Twin Towers collapse. Such microscopic sooty fragments are of concern to the public health community because they penetrate deep into lungs and contain the cancer-causing chemicals known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). David Williamson. Medical News Today. 26 July 2004.

[Cancer risk small but real](#)

A type of carcinogen carried in the dust that enveloped lower Manhattan after the World Trade Center catastrophe posed a very small cancer risk for most residents of the area, according to a new study. Nevertheless, the researchers urged more study on the potential health risks of children whose mothers breathed the air during pregnancy. Kathleen Kerr. Newsday. 27 July 2004.

[Some caulking may be linked to cancer, Harvard study finds](#)

The production of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, was banned in 1977, based on an increasingly disturbing picture of their health effects. However, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health announced yesterday that the rubbery caulking around windows in schools, dormitories, and hospitals may be a serious but unrecognized source of PCB contamination. Beth Daley. The Boston Globe. 21 July 2004.

[EPA Says DuPont Withheld Chemical's Danger](#)

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday charged DuPont Co., one of the world's largest chemical companies, with illegally withholding evidence for 20 years that a chemical used to make Teflon endangered its workers and the public. Marla Cone. Los Angeles Times. 9 July 2004 (subscription required).

**b) Lead:**

[Living on Earth: The Secret Life of Lead](#)

Living on Earth's hour-long documentary "The Secret Life of Lead" follows a team of researchers at the University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati Children's Hospital who have been trying to unravel the effects of childhood lead exposure. Allan Konopka. Living on Earth: The Secret Life of Lead. 9 July 2004.

[Lead products must go - now](#)

After a 4-year-old Colton swallowed a toy medallion, which stayed in his stomach for three weeks, the level of lead in his blood rose more than a dozen times the threshold for danger set by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lead toys are the source of lead poisoning for an estimate of 434,000 young children suffering from it. Jeff Gelles. The Knight Ridder/Tribune. 20 July 2004.

[Lead-poisoning fears prompt massive toy jewelry recall](#)

Some 150 million pieces of imported toy jewelry sold in vending machines are being recalled because they may contain dangerous levels

of lead, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) says. [Health Day News](#). 8 July 2004.

#### [Toy Jewelry Cited for Lead Content in Record Recall](#)

The government will issue a recall, officials said, of 150 million toy bracelets, rings and necklaces sold over the last 18 months because many of them contain dangerous amounts of lead. Stephen Labaton. [The New York Times](#). 8 July 2004 (subscription required).

#### [Vending Machine Industry Warned for Lead-Tainted Jewelry](#)

Following on the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) announcement today that lead-tainted jewelry will be recalled from vending machines nationwide, the Center for Environmental Health (CEH) is preparing further legal action to protect children who may have purchased contaminated jewelry from vending machines. Michael Green & Charles Margulis. [Environmental Media Services](#). 8 July 2004.

#### [Lack of information fuels fear over lead in school drinking water](#)

Despite almost daily reporting and meetings between school officials and concerned parents, the lack of information relating the levels of lead measured in school fountains to potential harm in the exposed children is striking. Catherine Karr. [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#). 14 July 2004.

#### [Get the lead out of schools' water](#)

Each day in Washington state, thousands of schoolchildren are likely to ingest mouthfuls of dangerous water contaminated with toxic levels of lead. Mark S. Cooper. [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#). 2 July 2004.

#### [Lead-tainted water in Seattle schools stuns parents](#)

The Browns, who's son was diagnosed with a mild case of Asberger syndrome, were shocked to learn that recent district-wide water tests found high levels of lead in drinking water at public schools throughout Seattle. They are wondering if the diagnose might be linked to heavy metal exposure. Deborah Bach. [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#). 2 July 2004.

#### [School district ignored lead hazard](#)

About 3.8 percent of Seattle Public Schools' drinking water fountains tested so far show sustained lead levels considered dangerous by the federal government, according to a district-wide testing ordered by the School Board. Sanjay Bhatt. [The Seattle Times](#). 2 July 2004.

#### [Parents voice anger over lead in school water](#)

Concern and anger spilled over at a Seattle school meeting last night, as parents demanded to know why the district did not act earlier to inform them about contaminants in school drinking-water and take steps to fix the problem. Deborah Bach. [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#). 8 July 2004.

#### [Lead levels would have to rise to endanger children, doctor says](#)

A pediatrician and toxicologist says it's unlikely a child would have any measurable harm from drinking water tainted with lead at the level seen in Seattle schools or at the even lower level in two Gig Harbor schools. Debby Abe. [The News Tribune](#). 20 July 2004.

#### [Lead, complacency are lousy mixture](#)

The Northwest's tendency to assume the purity of its environment already has received a healthy jolt. As experts note, Seattle Public Schools' long tolerance of stunningly high levels of lead may not have created health or developmental troubles for any individual child. But the district apparently ignored federal requirements that it inform parents of test results a decade ago. [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#). 27 July 2004.

[Hazards: Unlikely Sources of Lead Poison](#)

Most lead poisoning occurs on the job. But dangerous exposures can come from unlikely sources like tableware and traditional Indian medicines, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. John O'Neil. [The New York Times](#). 20 July 2004 (subscription required).

**c) Pesticides:**

[Apple a day may poison children](#)

Children who eat an apple or pear a day may be exceeding the pesticide safety threshold because of residues on the fruit, according to research. Paul Brown. [The Guardian](#). 30 July 2004.

[Pesticide levels 'high in fruit'](#)

Up to 220 young children a day may be exposed to potentially dangerous levels of pesticides just by eating an apple or a pear, say researchers. The charity Friends of the Earth based its calculation on government data on pesticide levels on fruit. [BBC News](#). 30 July 2004.

[Rotting Pesticides Plague Africa](#)

There are more than 50,000 tons of banned, contaminated or expired pesticides in Africa - poisons that kill about 1 million people a year. World Bank environmental specialist Steve Maber and the staff of the African Stockpiles Program aim to destroy them all within 15 years. The leaching chemicals have caused health problems for Moroccan city children, including asthma. [Reuters](#). 19 July 2004.

[Parents group wants pesticides out of schools](#)

A group of parents and teachers, focusing on a health issue, want the Durham Public Schools to implement a new pest control policy that doesn't use chemicals proven to be harmful to people. Sarah Muench. [The Herald-Sun](#). 18 July 2004.

[EPA to Award \\$500,000 in Regional Grants To Limit Children's Exposure, Other Projects](#)

The Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program (PESP) is a voluntary program that forms partnerships with pesticide users to reduce the health and environmental risks associated with pesticide use and implement pollution prevention strategies.

**d) Mercury:**

[Exposure to mercury linked to neurobehavioral disease epidemic in children](#)

The recent furor over the use of mercury in vaccines for children has gotten my attention. Many people are surprised to hear that mercury is

still used in vaccines for anyone, let alone little children, whose tolerance for such potent neurotoxins is very low. Curt Andersen. Green Bay News-Chronicle. 30 July 2004.

#### [Mercury and health](#)

Although even a few grams of mercury can contaminate a small lake for years, U.S. and Canadian coal-fired power plants emit many tonnes of it annually. Neither the U.S. nor Canada regulates the massive mercury emissions even though both governments recognize the threat to health that mercury poses Albert Koehl. The Globe and Mail. 6 July 2004.

#### [New law bans toys with mercury](#)

Gov. George Pataki signed legislation yesterday banning the sale of toy and novelty products containing mercury and urged Kellogg's to immediately remove its "Spider-Man 2" wrist toys from New York stores. Glenn Blain. The Journal News: Health. 13 July 2004.

#### [Tests Emerge to Assess Risks From Eating Fish](#)

Mercury found in seafood like swordfish and albacore tuna is already a controversial subject. Some doctors are responding to concerns about mercury in a way that is sparking more debate, by offering screenings that tell patients how much of the toxic heavy metal has accumulated in their bodies. Jane Spencer. The Wall Street Journal. 6 July 2004.

#### [Group calls attention to mercury-polluted fish](#)

The Texas Public Interest Research Group, an environmental watchdog group, hosted a "Men-Only Fish Fry" on Thursday to highlight the dangers mercury-contaminated fish can pose to women and children. Alice Wu. The Daily Texan. 23 July 2004.

## ~~ WATER AND SANITATION ~~

#### [Annan's wife to champion Africa's quest for sanitation](#)

UN secretary-general Kofi Annan's wife, Nane, has pledged to help push forward Africa's quest for adequate water and sanitation facilities in urban areas through top level advocacy. Panfrican News Agency (PANNA), Nairobi, Kenya. 7 July 2004.

#### [Romania's Polluted Water a Barrier to EU Member Status](#)

Since the fall of the communist regime, Garla Mare, a village of 3,500 inhabitants on the bank of the Danube and once a major grain producer for the country, has slid into poverty. The only legacy of that earlier era is a high level of pesticides in the ground water, which is the only source of drinking water in the area. Daniela Tuchel. Environment News Service (ENS), Romania. 20 July 2004 (subscription required).

## ~~ MISCELLANIOUS ~~

### [EPA helps fund Harvard research center for children's health](#)

Federal environmental regulators are teaming with Harvard University to establish a research center to investigate children's environmental health issues. WBZ-AM: Local News. 7 July 2004.

### [Birth Defects and the Environment](#)

Nearly half of all pregnancies in the US today result in the loss of the baby or a child born with a birth defect or chronic health problem. Genetic, nutritional, infectious, and other environmental factors, such as radiation, pharmaceuticals, and toxic chemicals, contribute to the total incidence of birth defects, but the percentage attributable to each is not known. Environmental Health Sciences, 2004.

### [Environmental groups criticise WHO plans to improve health](#)

A World Health Organization action plan to improve the health and environment of children in Europe has been criticized by environmental groups as not going far enough. Deborah Cohen. British Medical Journal. 3 July 2004.

### [Calming Parents' Fears About Environmental Hazards](#)

According to Dr. Robert L. Brent, a distinguished professor at Thomas Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, many millions of dollars are spent to clean up substances that actually present little or no risk to anyone's health. Jane. E. Brody. The New York Times: Health. 13 July 2004.

### [The Real Risks to Children](#)

Most of the hazards that take the greatest toll on the health and lives of the young people in this country can be prevented. Jane. E. Brody. The New York Times: Health. 13 July 2004.

### [Women and Environment: Long march to nowhere](#)

No other group is more affected by environmental destruction than rural women and girls. They are the true managers of natural resources, yet are underpaid, undervalued and unrecognized. Anil Agarwal. Gobar Times Magazine: Environment for kids monthly. 15 July 2004.

### [Environmental risks in the development of autism and autism spectrum disorders](#)

The Medical Research Council (MRC) has announced funding for a new study to find out more about the role of environmental risks in the development of autism and autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Medical Study News: News-Medical. 8 July 2004.

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