Worldwide, 13 million deaths could be prevented every year by making our environments healthier.

7 million deaths linked to air pollution annually

In new estimates released recently, by the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that in 2012 around 7 million people died – one in eight of total global deaths – as a result of air pollution exposure. This finding more than doubles previous estimates and confirms that air pollution is now the world’s largest single environmental health risk. Reducing air pollution could save millions of lives. In particular, the new data reveal a stronger link between both indoor and outdoor air pollution exposure and cardiovascular diseases, such as strokes and ischaemic heart disease, as well as between air pollution and cancer. This is in addition to air pollution’s role in the development of respiratory diseases, including acute respiratory infections and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases. The new estimates are not only based on more knowledge about the diseases caused by air pollution, but also upon better assessment of human exposure to air pollutants through the use of improved measurements and technology. This has enabled scientists to make a more detailed analysis of health risks from a wider demographic spread that now includes rural as well as urban areas. Click here for the latest data, press release, feature story, and facts sheets.

NIEHS: new WHO collaborating centre for environmental health

After more than 30 years of close collaboration, the US National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) recently became a WHO Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health Sciences. As a Collaborating Centre, the NIEHS will assist WHO in developing training programmes, support and host conferences and workshops in five key areas: children's environmental health; climate change and human health; developmental origins of health and disease; e-waste; and indoor air pollution. “By joining forces, NIEHS and WHO will help to ensure that cutting edge environmental health science will be translated into effective public health interventions to improve health around the world,” said NIEHS and NTP Director, Dr Linda Birnbaum The official launch took place on 20 February 2014.

Network to advance progress in children’s environmental health

In collaboration with NIEHS, other WHO collaborating centres and various partners, the Public Health, Environment and Social Determinants section of WHO is building a network of Children’s Environmental Health Centres (CEHCs). With the goal of creating a network capable of sharing and capturing information that will help WHO identify research gaps and advance children’s research, this initiative will help expand the WHO network and provide WHO with the necessary data/information to facilitate communication with country leaders and policy-makers. An upcoming series of papers in The Lancet Global Health will focus on children’s environmental health and provide an opportunity to draw attention to and promote the issues. “Networking to advance progress in children’s environmental health” was published in March 2014.
Launch of WHO International Scheme to Evaluate Household Water Treatment Technologies

The main objectives of the recently-launched scheme are to promote and coordinate independent and consistent testing and evaluation of household water treatment products based on WHO health-based performance criteria, and to support governments in related technical capacity building activities. A call for submissions for Round I of testing has been issued and products that meet minimum criteria will be sent to one of two designated testing laboratories for evaluation. Click here for more information on the scheme, including testing protocols and a new report on demand for testing.

International consultation on workers’ health coverage

Workers represent half the world’s population and are the major contributors to economic and social development. Yet only 15% of workers worldwide have access to specialized occupational health services for advising employers and for providing assessment of occupational health risks, health surveillance, training in safe working methods and first aid. Universal health coverage cannot be achieved until all working people – particularly in informal settings, small enterprises, rural, agricultural and migrant workers – have access to essential health services to prevent occupational and work-related diseases. To coincide with International Day for Health and Safety at Work, a three-day meeting will focus on interventions, indicators and service delivery, as well as policy options, strategies and mechanisms to scale up coverage of workers. It aims to develop criteria and indicators for measuring the access of workers to interventions for the prevention and control of occupational and work-related diseases and injuries. The consultation will take place on 28–30 April 2014, in Semnan, Islamic Republic of Iran.

Moving towards a climate-neutral UN

The fourth edition of Moving towards a climate-neutral UN – the annual progress report on the UN’s journey towards climate neutrality – details the UN’s greenhouse gas emissions in 2011 and some of the activities undertaken in 2012 to reduce them.

New Publications and videos

Moving towards a climate-neutral UN

Selected health topics from WHO’s public health and environment web sites

Climate change and health
Ionizing radiation in emergencies
Water, sanitation and health
Ambient and household air pollution (new)
Occupational Health (new)

Regional public health and environment links

WHO Regional Office for Africa
WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia
WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific
WHO Regional Office for the Americas
WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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Ambient (outdoor) air pollution

- Air pollution is a major environmental risk to health. By reducing air pollution levels, countries can reduce the burden of disease from stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases, including asthma.

- Ambient (outdoor air pollution) in both cities and rural areas was estimated to cause 3.7 million premature deaths worldwide per year in 2012.

- Some 88% of those premature deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries, and the greatest burden is in the Western Pacific and South East Asian WHO regions.

Read the full fact sheet

Launch of WHO International Scheme to Evaluate Household Water Treatment Technologies

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