Global report on Fukushima nuclear accident details health risks

A comprehensive assessment by international experts of the health risks associated with the Fukushima Daichi nuclear power plant (NPP) disaster in Japan has concluded that, for the general population inside and outside Japan, the predicted risks are low and no observable increases in cancer rates above baseline rates are anticipated. The World Health Organization (WHO) report ‘Health Risk Assessment from the nuclear accident after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami’ noted, however, that the estimated risk for specific cancers in certain subsets of the population in Fukushima Prefecture has increased and, as such, it calls for long-term continued monitoring and health screening for those people. This is the first-ever analysis of the global health effects due to radiation exposure after the Fukushima NPP accident and is the result of a two-year WHO-led process of analysis of estimated doses and their potential health implications. Click here for the press release, FAQs, and Executive summary.

Effects of human and wildlife exposure to hormone-disrupting chemicals

Many synthetic chemicals, untested for their disrupting effects on hormone systems, could have significant health implications, according to State of the science of endocrine-disrupting chemicals, a new landmark report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The joint study calls for more research to understand fully the associations between endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) – found in many household and industrial products – and specific diseases and disorders. The report notes that with more comprehensive assessments and better testing methods, potential disease risks could be reduced, with substantial savings to public health. Human health depends on a well-functioning endocrine system to regulate the release of certain hormones that are essential for functions such as metabolism, growth and development, sleep and mood. Some substances known as endocrine disruptors can alter the functions of this hormonal system, increasing the risk of adverse health effects. Some EDCs occur naturally, while synthetic varieties can be found in pesticides, electronics and personal care products and cosmetics. The study was launched in Nairobi, Kenya on 19 February 2013.

Risk assessment and management of chemicals: Electronic distance learning tool launched

A new electronic distance learning tool on risk assessment and management was launched by Professor Dr Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol, President of the Chulabhorn Research Institute (Thailand) during a recent visit to the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia in New Delhi, India. The electronic distance learning tool (eDLT) on risk assessment and risk management of chemicals aims to make globally-relevant training materials available and to provide a self-guided, web-based training tool on the general principles and concepts of risk assessment and management.

The tool comprises eight modules on safety assessment of chemicals, including problem formulation, hazard assessment, exposure assessment, risk characterization for human health and ecological and risk management. The electronic distance learning tool is targeted at public health, environment and medical professionals, particularly in developing countries and those with economies in transition, which may lack a critical mass of qualified personnel. Public policy, engineering and legal professionals in these countries may also find the tool of value.
All forms of asbestos are carcinogenic: Joint WHO/IARC statement

In a joint statement, WHO and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) have reconfirmed their commitment that all forms of asbestos are carcinogenic to humans, and that stopping the use of all forms of asbestos is the most efficient way to eliminate asbestos-related risk and diseases. The organizations remain committed to providing the most reliable, independent scientific evidence on which public health decisions can be based.

Each year, about 125 million people are exposed to asbestos in the workplace, and more than 107 000 people die annually from asbestos-related lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis resulting from occupational exposure. One in every three deaths from occupational cancer is estimated to be caused by asbestos. In addition, it is estimated that several thousand deaths annually can be attributed to asbestos exposure in the home. Click here for the full fact sheet.

22 March – World Water Day

The current International Year of Water Cooperation and World Water Day (22 March 2013), are devoted to the theme ‘Water cooperation’. The objective of a dedicated year is to raise awareness surrounding the potential for increased cooperation, and about challenges facing water management in light of increased demand for water access, allocation and services. The year will highlight the history of successful water cooperation initiatives, as well as identifying critical issues concerning water education, water diplomacy, trans-boundary water management, financing cooperation, national/international legal frameworks, and linkages with the Millennium Development Goals. It will also provide an opportunity to capitalize on the momentum created at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), and to support the formulation of new objectives that will contribute towards developing water resources that are truly sustainable. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the lead agency for 2013 World Water Day.

Post-2015 development agenda consultation on water

As the world approaches 2015 – the target year for the Millennium Development Goals – the United Nations has launched a worldwide consultation process on the post-2015 development agenda. The consultation concentrates on a number of thematic areas. Due to its crucial role – in health, livelihoods and economic development of nations, food and energy security, and the integrity of ecosystems – water has been chosen as one of the consultation themes. The next milestone in this process is a 27-28 February 2013 meeting in Geneva which will discuss the outcomes of two water-related discussion areas: Water resources management as well as wastewater management and water quality.

SELECTED HEALTH TOPICS FROM WHO’S PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT WEB SITES

Chemical Safety - Updated

Outdoor air pollution

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
WHO Regional Office for Europe

New Publication

State of the science of endocrine-disrupting chemicals, 2012

Health Risk Assessment from the nuclear accident after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami

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FACTS AND FIGURES

- About 125 million people in the world are exposed to asbestos in the workplace.
- All forms of asbestos are carcinogenic to humans, and may cause mesothelioma and cancer of the lung, larynx and ovary. Asbestos exposure is also responsible for other diseases, such as asbestosis (fibrosis of the lungs), pleural plaques, thickening and effusions. Click here for more information on asbestos related diseases.
- According to WHO estimates, more than 107 000 people die each year from asbestos-related lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis resulting from occupational exposure.