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First Steering Committee Meeting for
the European Conference on Health and
the Human Environment

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REPORT

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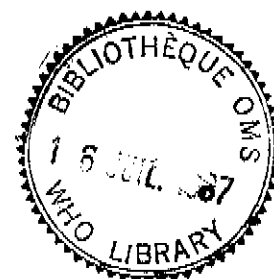
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1. Introduction

In 1988, the WHO Regional Office for Europe plans to hold a European Conference on Health and the Environment, the major aim of which will be to advocate EURO/HFA Target 18 which states that: "by 1990, Member States should have multisectoral policies that effectively protect the environment from health hazards, ensure community awareness and involvement, and effectively support international efforts to curb such hazards affecting more than one country". The preparation of this Conference should also be based upon the conclusions and recommendations of the WHO Working Group on Health and the Environment, held in Vienna in December 1983, the report on which has been published as European Reports and Studies, No. 100. The conclusions and recommendations of the Vienna Working Group were as follows:

Data

There are gaps in data on environmental health; for instance there is no linkage between morbidity/mortality data and environmental exposure. If already existing data were properly collated and disseminated, many of the existing shortcomings could be overcome, but a more comprehensive and well-structured approach is needed both nationally and internationally. It is important that available expertise for this task should be identified and the efforts of these experts effectively harnessed.

The means to obtain more comprehensive environmental health data need to be developed and optimum use needs to be made of existing data by exploiting modern information technology.

Efforts should be made to ascertain where specific environmental health-related data are located. In some cases these data will need to be substantially augmented. A system should be established that allows the effective linkage of existing knowledge about people's health and biological effects, derived clinically, toxicologically or epidemiologically. All possible sources of health-related data, including the health services, other public services and industry, should be used effectively.

National environmental health policies

A multisectoral approach to environmental health is essential. Although government structures differ throughout the Region, appropriate coordination is essential everywhere to ensure that health is taken into consideration in all relevant sectors of government.

National environmental health policies should be developed. Primary prevention should be a priority and mechanisms for setting priorities in a systematic manner should be developed.

Risk assessment

The question of risk assessment is of utmost importance. The principles behind the recommendations in the report on the Planning Consultation in Ulm and the description of the risk assessment process and model are endorsed and should be further developed. The risk assessment process should take into account all routes of exposure, including water, air,

food and the working environment, and should consider microbiological, physical, chemical and social risks. The potential impact on health of new technology - including biotechnology - and new products should be studied. Combined risks and indirect risks should be evaluated and the interdisciplinary nature of risk assessment should be recognized.

A holistic approach to risk assessment is required, taking into account economic, social and other factors with their beneficial as well as detrimental aspects.

The scientific basis for risk assessment should be strengthened.

Measures should be taken to ensure a more systematic identification of new environmental hazards and their potential health risks.

Research

Research in the biological sciences will have great significance in environmental health during the next few years. In addition to exposure from the general environment and the workplace, factors such as lifestyle, nutrition, stress and genetically derived individual sensitivity can all influence health.

The body's defence mechanism is essential to protect its health against insults from the environment. Some information indicates that this defence mechanism is greatly fortified by correct and adequate nutrition.

Research should be encouraged to identify the lifestyle, nutrition, stress and genetically determined defence mechanisms against toxic substances that contribute to ill health.

Efforts should be made to expand and coordinate clinical and epidemiological investigations to help identify environmental hazards and enhance prevention.

Collaboration between the medical and biological sciences in the field of the environment should be strengthened both nationally and internationally.

The use of industrial resources to support research should be carefully considered.

Education, training and communication

An interdisciplinary approach to environmental health is important. There is a lack of sufficiently trained personnel in many areas. The public needs better information about environmental health problems, including the role of lifestyle, and a better understanding of risk and risk prevention.

Environmental health, including occupational health, should be given more emphasis in medical training curricula.

Training in toxicology, epidemiology and appropriate biological sciences needs to be strengthened.

Specific training programmes in the methods of risk assessment should be established.

Public agencies should be encouraged to inform the public about comparative risks and the risks of individual hazards, without causing unnecessary alarm.

In addition this Vienna Working Group made the following statement regarding the role of the WHO Regional Office for Europe:

International cooperation and collaboration in environmental health is clearly needed. Not only WHO, but other members of the United Nations family including the Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Labour Office and the Food and Agriculture Organization have important roles to play both individually and jointly. The same is true of a number of intergovernmental organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance and the Commission of the European Communities. It is particularly important that European endeavours in environmental health should take place in a global context. Experience gained in industrialized countries should be shared with less developed countries and steps taken in developed countries should not have detrimental impacts in developing countries, whether in the European Region or elsewhere.

The Regional Office has an important role to play in data collection, evaluation and dissemination as well as in the training of personnel in environmental health, including toxicologists and middle-level personnel for inspection and control functions. The Regional Office also has an important role to play in stimulating increased efforts to solve specific environmental health problems. These endeavours should involve technical cooperation both nationally and internationally.

Sectors of government other than health ministries concerned with environmental health should establish contact with the Regional Office. This will be difficult to carry out through the existing policy organs, in particular the Regional Committee, although it may be advisable in special instances to enlarge national delegations. A useful way for other sectors of government to increase contact with the Regional Office would be to establish a WHO European advisory group, which should be multisectoral and interdisciplinary. It should meet regularly to advise the Regional Office on all aspects of environmental health and on the programme development of the Office. Membership should be on a rotational basis and the structure of the existing WHO European Advisory Committee for Medical Research is an example of how the group should be established. It might be advantageous to hold meetings of the advisory group in different countries of the Region to provide the group with varying national experiences.

Although an advisory group should get top priority, a European conference on environmental health could also be useful, attended by senior government representatives from various branches of national administrations, to discuss national environmental health policies.
(Underlining added).

Finally, a WHO European multidisciplinary centre for environmental health could be established, but more detailed information should be collected by the Regional Office on what it should do, and how, and what other such centres are already doing elsewhere.

Following the penultimate sentence of the Working Group statement regarding the role of WHO/EURO, this Advisory Group was convened to discuss the preparation of a Conference, the main aim and purpose of which will be to recommend a new approach to national environmental health policies.

The holding of this Conference is planned within WHO/EURO programme budget document 1988-89 as "Output" 18.1.1, and a collaboration agreement was signed on 25 November 1986 with the Regional Government of Veneto which has agreed to host and support this Conference.

2. Discussions

2.1 During the opening of the meeting, it was explained that this first meeting of the Steering Committee should be a brainstorming one on broad policy issues, the objective of which will be to produce the scope and purpose of the Conference. The history of the Conference was recalled from the Vienna Working Group on Health and the Environment. The participants were briefed on the change of WHO/EURO policy from ad hoc public health issues to comprehensive public health strategy, such as the present one summarized in the 38 targets of the European Strategy for Health for All in the Year 2000. However, this strategy was mainly designed for the Ministry of Health, while environmental health is in the special position of being intersectoral. Therefore, the main purpose of the Conference should be to encourage multisectorality in each country. It will be successful if decision-makers from several ministries in each country can be assembled. The problem to be solved is the lack of international collaboration at country level. But WHO is linked to the ministries of health which may fail to act as leaders.

A good example of this problem is found in the draft report of EURO survey of water services in Europe, which shows that in some countries up to 5 or 6 different ministries deal with water problems.

The first question to be answered by the group is, "Do we need a Conference? and if so, what kind?"

What are the limits of the environmental health field? It includes a dozen different subjects, of which not all are relevant to European conditions.

The following checklist of questions to be answered was proposed to the group:

1. Should there be a European Conference?
2. If affirmative, what do you want to get out of it?
3. What type of conference should it be?
4. Should it be an open conference with scientific papers?

5. Who should open the Conference? Gro Bruntland, NOR, has been proposed (she also is President of the World Commission on the Environment).
6. Should futurology be an important theme of the Conference? (Conference could open with famous speaker on futurology, i.e. Martin Hallgate or Petitjohn).
7. Should funding be touched on, i.e. comment about Venice meeting?
8. Should the Conference be a WHO/EURO meeting or should it be jointly sponsored by other international organizations?
9. What type of people do we want to attract? Senior officials from ministries of health, or others?
10. What type of logo should the Conference have? (To be used on letterhead, envelopes, all material leading towards the conference, i.e. all forthcoming EH publications such as occupational health services in Europe, water services in Europe and food safety services in Europe.
11. Should an international environmental health forum be established to advise the Regional Committee?
12. What should the timetable for the Conference be? (Timetable must be correlated with that of CEC - Year of the Environment).

2.2 The group discussed the need for intersectorality. In numerous countries there is a Ministry of Environment separated from the Ministry of Health, both ministries having limited contact. In other countries the Ministry of Agriculture is in charge of environmental protection. When the interest of the Ministry of Health in environmental questions decreases, the result is that the Ministry in charge of Environmental Protection will give higher priority, for example, to nature conservation rather than to environmental issues affecting human health.

Of course WHO cannot teach intersectorality to its Member States; it can only advocate the need for intersectorality.

Another objective of the Conference may be overall priority setting in relation to the environmental health priorities for the year 1990.

It was pointed out that more than the lack of intersectoral collaboration, the problem in some countries may be the decreasing interest of public health services in environmental health questions. Another point is the need for intersectorality within the environmental sector; for example, people in charge of water quality monitoring have limited contacts with those in charge of air quality monitoring. Despite the fact that planning and management are generally better in environmental health than in public health, there is a need for intersectoral environmental health monitoring, and for monitoring systems with a clearly defined objective such as information for decision-making. Risk management and public perception, together with better environmental health data collection through appropriate monitoring, will contribute to the decision-making process. Actual information on intersectorality in environmental health activities in the European countries

is found in the surveys carried out by WHO/EURO on environmental health services in Europe, on food safety services, on water services and on occupational health services.

2.3 The group discussed the content and the definition of environmental health. The way of looking at the environment is changing. There is a growing feeling that humans have to shape nature to their needs; therefore, the natural environment may become less important than the man-made environment. At government level there is also a new approach to public health which stresses the links between the social and the physical environment. Dr B.C.J. Zoeteman presented a diagram which has the merit of showing clearly the field of environmental health (see attached). It was agreed to approve the use of this diagram which shows that the borderline of environmental health is environmental impact assessment, and prevention should start on the borderline. The EIA borderline is the interface between technology and the natural environment, the other borderline is the risk assessment process, i.e. the interface between environmental health activities and medical research. The Conference will be structured on the basis of Dr Zoeteman's diagram.

2.4 The discussion then moved to the attendance at the Conference. To achieve a maximum impact, the Conference should attract high-level decision-makers, i.e. ministers or general directors. To attract such people, the Conference should be presented with a declaration to adopt and/or a convention to sign. There is therefore a need for a preparatory Working Group at technical level to prepare such documents. The Conference itself at ministerial level will be a political meeting where most of the time will be used for governmental statement, and in the end the declaration will be adopted and the convention signed, both documents being previously agreed upon as a result of the Working Group at general directors' level.

The remaining problem is to achieve intersectoral attendance in both meetings. There is a need for inviting, at least, ministers of health and ministers of environment (or agriculture).

The declaration and the convention should deal with the environmental health priorities of the near future. The group therefore felt the need to discuss the futurology dimension of the Conference more in depth.

2.5 Documentation for the preparatory Working Group and the Conference. It was agreed that the preparatory Working Group will use as background document the WHO/EURO surveys on environmental health services in Europe, on food safety services, on water services, on occupational health services, and on environmental health inspection services.

It was also agreed that preliminary consultation will be needed to review working papers prepared by selected experts. The group will, therefore, have to select appropriate subjects for these working papers. In order to do so, a brainstorming meeting based upon "imaginative thinking" was recommended.

2.6 A brainstorming exercise took place on the basis of an "imaginative thinking" process. To do that, potential environmental health subjects were linked by key words, and they were evaluated by reference to a set of weighted criteria. The final result of the exercise was the selection of the following five working papers:

- 2.6.1 Historical perspective of environmental development at country level, with special focus on the period from 1972 to 1986.
- 2.6.2 Future trends in Europe regarding environmental problems and environmentally related health problems, up to the year 2000.
- 2.6.3 Priority setting for decision-making in environmental health (health dimensions of shaping the environment to humans, or humans to the environment?).
- 2.6.4 Environmental risk management and risk perception by the populations.
- 2.6.5 The need for new health, and environmental health, management concepts.
- 2.7 Preparation of the working papers (first phase January/April 1987). It was agreed after discussions that in the first phase, these first working papers will be prepared through the consolidation of several contributions.
 - 2.7.1 Historical environmental health perspectives will be prepared by selected experts in five countries geographically distributed throughout Europe.
 - 2.7.2 Two papers will be prepared by selected experts on future trends, the first one to cover trends in European environmental problems, and the other to cover trends in environmentally related health problems.
 - 2.7.3 A working paper will be prepared on risk management, and another on and priority-setting for decision-making in the environmental health field,
 - 2.7.4 both by the WHO specialized collaborating centre.
 - 2.7.5 A preliminary paper on new approaches to environmental and health management will be prepared by a selected expert.
- 2.8 Preparatory consultation and finalization of working papers
 - 2.8.1 A second meeting of the Steering Committee will be necessary in May 1987 in order to review the above-mentioned papers and to prepare a first draft declaration/resolution/recommendations/targets which may be part of the Conference outputs.
 - 2.8.2 During the period June-September 1987, a consultant will be required to consolidate the five country reviews into a single working paper on the historical perspective of environmental health development in Europe, including the comments of the Steering Committee. Another consultant will be required to review and develop the preliminary paper on new approaches to environmental and health management, based upon the review by the Steering Committee of all available papers. Finally, the two papers on future trends will be combined.
 - 2.8.3 A paper will be prepared for the 37th WHO/EURO Regional Committee, to keep the Member States informed on the progress achieved in the preparation of the Conference (September 1987).

- 2.8.4 A first preparatory consultation with experts from Member States will be convened in October or November 1987, to discuss historical perspectives and future trends in environmental health in Europe (working papers 241 and 242).
- 2.8.5 A second preparatory consultation with national experts will be held in November or December 1987, to discuss risk management issues and priority-setting for decision-making in environmental health (working papers 243 and 244). After these two consultations, the first four working papers will be finalized.
- 2.8.6 During the period January-February 1988, working paper No. 245 on new approaches to environmental health management will be finalized according to the conclusions and recommendations of the first two preparatory consultations.
- 2.8.7 The final review of working paper 245 will be carried out in a third preparatory consultation to be held in March 1988. This paper will be final.

2.9 Working group and conference

During the period January-May 1988, a four-language Working Group at the level of General Director (of Health and for Environmental Protection) will be prepared, to discuss intersectorality in environmental health work.

The Working Group will be expected to meet in June 1988 to discuss technical and policy issues, and the declaration/resolutions/convention will be discussed, adjusted and hopefully agreed upon.

The Conference itself at ministerial level will take place in October 1988. It will provide an opportunity for each government to express its views on the links between health and environment, and on the need for European collaboration in environmental health. At the end of the Conference, the recommendations/resolutions/comments agreed upon in the Working Group may be formally approved and signed.

2.10 Expected outcome of the Conference

The Working Group will discuss the nature of the outcome which may be expected from the Conference: a declaration, a set of resolutions/recommendations, or the signing of an International Convention. The Group will carry out a second "imaginative thinking" exercise in order to try to identify some possible outcomes.

The following subjects were considered high priorities as practical issues:

- Environmental health impact of energy production;
- Environmental health impact of intensive agriculture;
- Impact of demographic changes on health and welfare services;
- Man-made technological disasters;
- Public awareness of environmental health hazards;
- Long-term effects of exposure to chemicals;
- Possibility in the future of genetic screening;

- Indoor climate impact on respiratory allergies;
- Bioaccumulation of pollution and its transfer;
- Environmental pressure from the development of leisure industry;
- Recycling of wastes;
- Purposeful environmental health data monitoring;
- Risk management of environmental health hazards;
- Transfrontier environmental health issues;
- Deregulation trends;
- Increasing cost of health protection;

The Steering Committee identified the following as subjects for possible recommendations:

- Multisectoral approach to environmental management;
- Prevention of negative environmental impact;
- Better prediction of environmental impact;
- Environmental data collection for decision-making;
- Better public understanding of environmental health issues;
- Better knowledge of health effects of environmental parameters;
- Interdisciplinary training and research in environmental health.

2.11 Practical aspects of the Conference planning

The Conference title may be "Environmental and Human Health in the Year 2000". There will be simultaneous translation in all four WHO/EURO working languages, and all the Member States of the European Region will be invited to send representatives from, at least, their Ministry of Health and Ministry of Environmental Protection. Interested international organizations will be invited to send observers. A "Patronage Bureau" will be organized with a group of important personalities.

2.12 Other important points

Clearly, the Conference will focus on environmental problems which have direct consequences for human health. It is also clear that the Conference will concentrate especially on transboundary environmental health issues. The main purpose of the Conference is to review the progress achieved towards the 8 environmental health target of the WHO/EURO strategy for HFA, and especially towards targets 18, 19, 20 and 22 to be reached by 1990. The proposal for a European environmental health institute will be discussed again at the next Steering Committee meeting.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

It was not possible at this first Steering Committee meeting to clarify all the questions related to the Conference. The remaining ones will be settled at the second meeting.

The Steering Committee has, however, reached final conclusions regarding the process of preparing the Conference. This process is described in the above paragraphs 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7.

It is expected that the Regional Government of Veneto will agree to host the Conference and its preparatory Working Group in Venice and to support its preparatory activities.

Upon this assumption, a planning memorandum will be prepared for the first phase of the preparatory process and submitted for the approval of WHO/EURO's Regional Director after discussion by a WHO/EURO interservice task force. This first phase will extend up to and including the second meeting of the Steering Committee.

SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESS.

NATURE & PRODUCTION

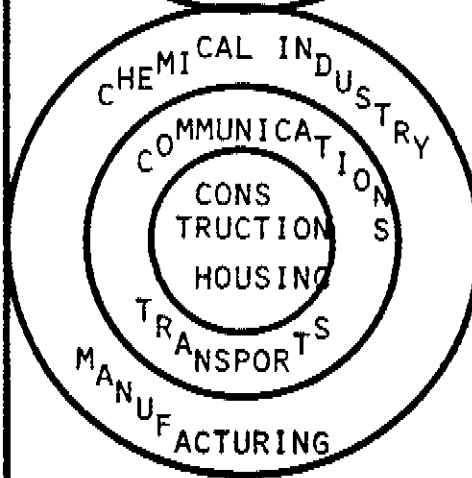
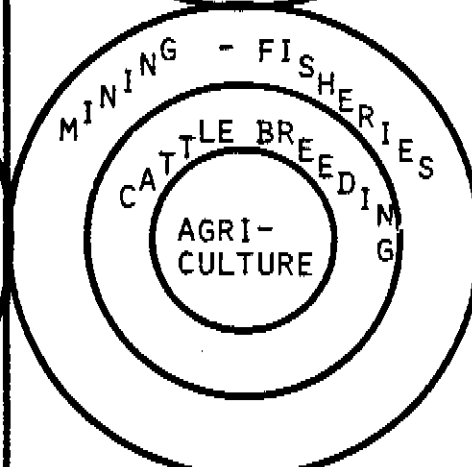
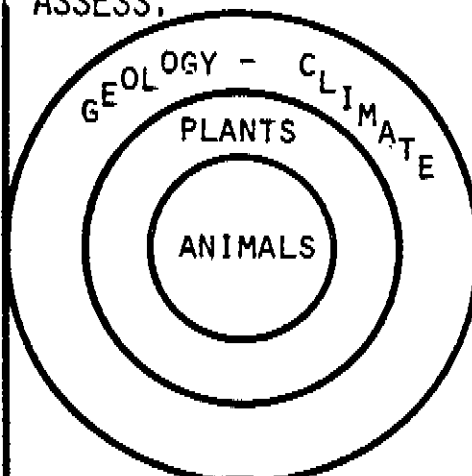
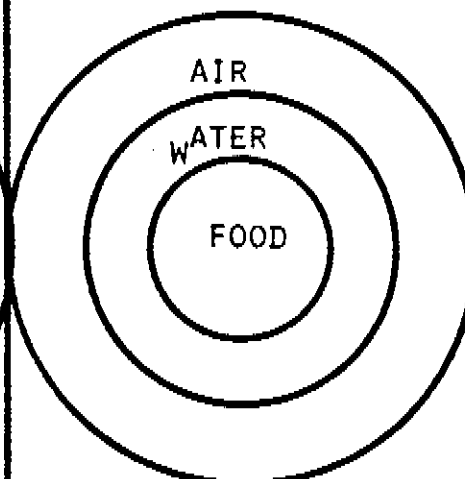
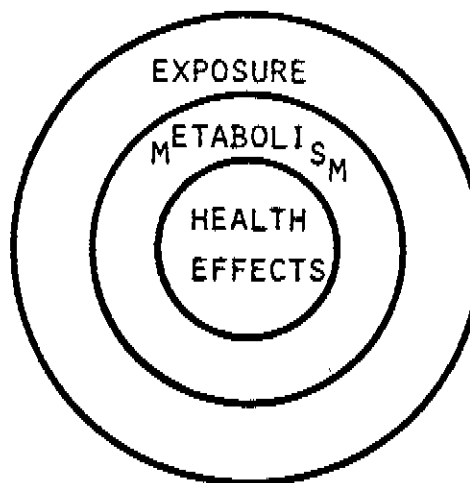
M A N

ENVIRONMENTAL PATHWAYS OF EXPOSURE

N A T U R E

P R O D U C T I O N

T E C H N O L O G Y



+ ANIMAL VECTORS OF DISEASES

+ RADIATIONS AND VIBRATIONS

EFFECTS

VECTORS

SOURCES

PHYSICIANS

EH PROFESSIONALS

ENGINEERS

(FROM DR ZOETEMAN)