

Procedure file

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Environment and health: the European Action Plan 2004-2010		
Subject 3.70 Environmental policy 4.20 Public health		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Environment, Public Health and Food Safety	ALDE RIES Frédérique	01/09/2004
Council of the European Union	Council configuration	Meeting	Date
	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs2627		06/12/2004

Key events			
09/06/2004	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2004)0416	Summary
28/10/2004	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
06/12/2004	Debate in Council	2627	
20/01/2005	Vote in committee		
25/01/2005	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0008/2005	
22/02/2005	Debate in Parliament		
23/02/2005	Decision by Parliament	T6-0045/2005	Summary
23/02/2005	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
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Documentation gateway					
Non-legislative basic document		COM(2004)0416	09/06/2004	EC	Summary
Economic and Social Committee: opinion, report		CES1636/2004 OJ C 157 28.06.2005, p. 0065-0069	15/12/2004	ESC	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0008/2005	25/01/2005	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0045/2005 OJ C 304 01.12.2005, p. 0139-0264 E	23/02/2005	EP	Summary

Environment and health: the European Action Plan 2004-2010

PURPOSE : to present a Commission Report on "The European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010."

CONTENT : this Report was prepared by the Commission in June 2004, representing its contribution to the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, organised by the WHO in Budapest. The Report acts as a policy document in which the Commission's strategic views on the environment and health problems are outlined. Specifically, the Report sets out a list of Action Plans, which the EU will implement over the coming years in order to try and curb the growth in environmental health related problems as well as to increase the EU's knowledge of how environmental pollutants may aggravate health difficulties amongst the wider European population. The Commission's proposed Strategy puts special emphasis on children given that they face greater exposure to environmental pollutants than adults.

Concretely speaking, the Report proposes that, in future, focus should be given to research which examines a possible causal link between the environment and health concerns. The results of such research could, in turn, be fed into the policy-making process. The added value of such focused research would be the development of a Community system integrating information on the state of the environment, the ecosystem and human health. Such an approach would render assessment of the overall environmental impact on human health more efficient by taking into account what effect a cocktail of pollutants has on human health, a combined exposure of pollutants and lastly what cumulative effects the environment can play on human health. The Strategy, proposed by the Commission, is to set out a long-term approach, which will be implemented in cycles, gradually expanding its coverage as the knowledge base improves.

In order to implement the new Strategy the Commission has defined a number of Actions with an initial starting period of 2004 lasting until 2010. Essentially speaking, the proposed Action Plan has been designed to give the EU the scientifically grounded information needed to help all 25 EU Member States reduce the adverse health impacts of certain environmental factors and to endorse better co-operation between actors in the environment, health and research fields. The three main themes of the Action Plan centre on:

- Improving the information chain in order to understand the links between sources of pollution and health effects.
- Filling the knowledge gap by strengthening research and addressing the emerging issues on environment and health.
- Reviewing policies and improving communications.

As a first step, the plan is to assess the contribution that environmental factors make to health problems. This involves completing the knowledge and information chain. Secondly, the Action Plan seeks to reinforce the scientific research efforts regarding causal links between environmental factors and human health through the EU Research Framework Programme. Based on the conclusions of any such research the EU can then begin to formulate appropriate policy options.

Illnesses to be given particular attention under the Action Plan include respiratory diseases, neuro-developmental disorders, cancers and endocrine disrupting effects. The Action Plan will set up targeted research actions to improve and refine our knowledge of the pollutants linking health to the environment. Another areas to be given special attention is food and the factors most linked to the occurrence of diseases related to food. The data collection and monitoring systems used to examine PCB's, heavy metals and endocrine disrupters will be adopted by the Action Plan to assess exposure levels not only to the pilot substances but to all of the principal environmental factors associated with health problems.

Environment and health: the European Action Plan 2004-2010

Parliament adopted, by 576 votes in favour, 45 against, with 13 abstentions, an own-initiative report on the European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010. It denounces the major downgrading in approach and ambition between the Commission's Environment and Health Strategy and what should be its implementation, the Action Plan; considers that the Action Plan can at best be seen as a Research Action Plan, which is unlikely in itself to reduce disease burden by environmental factors.

Moreover, Parliament regrets that, of the thirteen actions set out in the Commission's environment and health strategy for 2004 to 2010, only four are concerned with specific measures and that none of them set any targets.

It notes that there is no mention of immediately putting in place a biomonitoring system across the Union, based on the tracking of biological markers, in order to measure exposure to environmental contaminants, to be linked to the observation of effects by specialists in environmental medicine.

Parliament considers that biomonitoring should contribute to a risk evaluation policy and should be used first and foremost in relation to

infectious diseases, such as legionnaires' disease, and cancers caused by certain contaminants and for which 'cause and effect' can be more easily established: the link between asbestos and pleural cancer, between arsenic and kidney cancer and between some pesticides and leukaemia, lymph node cancer and prostate cancer.

Parliament believes that urgent consideration needs to be given to restricting the marketing and/or the use of the following dangerous substances, to which new-born babies, children, pregnant women, elderly persons, workers and other high-risk sections of the population are heavily exposed, as safer alternatives become available: six products from the phthalate family (DEHP, DINP, DBP, DIDP, DNOP, BBP) in domestic products for indoor use and in medical devices, except where such a restriction would have a negative impact on medical treatment; chlorinated solvents used in the manufacture of paint, coatings and polymers; mercury used in dental amalgams and in non-electrical or non-electronic measuring and monitoring devices; cadmium, in its different applications and three products from the organophosphate pesticide family (chlorpyrifos, diazinon and malathion) and endosulfan, an organochlorine pesticide, in all their uses.

The Commission is asked to give priority to research into the production and use of everyday consumer product categories that contain chemicals which can lead to allergies and cancer in humans;

Parliament calls for the Action Plan to define, as a matter of priority, acceptable environmental conditions for areas where children frequently spend long periods of time, such as nurseries, playgrounds and schools. It supports all the proposed measures to facilitate public access to information and repeats its call for the creation of national registers to record over large geographical areas both the major emissions and the most prevalent diseases. In addition, it considers that the Commission could use the new European geographical database, INSPIRE, for this purpose.

The Commission's willingness to continue to act to put an end to smoking in enclosed spaces or allow for designated physically separate smoking areas which are properly ventilated is welcomed and it is encouraged to designate environmental tobacco smoke a class 1 carcinogen. However, Parliament asks the Commission to give priority to cross-border problems and to health problems that are clearly related to environment, and proposes that more funding be dedicated to research into chemical-related diseases, the results of which should be used for health improving actions.

The Commission is called upon to draft a Green Paper dealing specifically with domestic pollution.

Furthermore, Parliament asks the Commission to promote vigorously a new initiative that has been launched in some Member States, i.e. the setting up of mobile units named 'environmental ambulances', which aims to perform a global environmental analysis and to identify indoor pollutants likely to have adverse effects on human health.

Parliament repeats its call for particular attention to be paid to people living close to sources of pollution and calls on the Commission to launch an initiative to reduce industrial atmospheric emissions of toxic substances by 2010, the priority targets being dioxin, cadmium, lead, vinyl chloride monomer and benzene, according to percentages and reference years to be determined.

The Commission is called upon to present a specific financial statement on the implementation of priority actions for 2004-2007 and the forecasts for the implementation of integrated environment and health actions in the context of drawing up the new financial perspective of the EU.

Parliament stresses that, in order to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of the Action Plan, it is necessary to begin to establish adequate funding for the 2004-2007 period immediately. 'Environment and Health' projects should be a separate subject under the Seventh Research Framework Programme (2007-2010) and receive generous funding, which should not be less than EUR 300m given the huge expectations and socio-economic issues at stake in the field of environmental health.

Lastly, the Parliament calls on the Commission to inform it about the modifications to the Action Plan with the aim of presenting it and the Council with an annual report verifying the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the actions of the Action Plan in terms of the reduction of environment-related health problems.