



ADVICE TO COUNCIL: No. 02-01

Re: Children's Health and the Environment in North America

The Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) of North America;

IN ACCORDANCE with Article 16(4) of the NAAEC, that JPAC “may provide advice to the Council on any matter within the scope of this agreement (...) and on the implementation and further elaboration of this agreement, and may perform such other functions as the Council may direct”;

HAVING held a very productive joint public meeting on 7 March 2002 with the Expert Advisory Board on Children's Health and the Environment in North America, reviewed and received comments on the draft *Cooperative Agenda for Children's Health and the Environment in North America*;

REITERATING our view that children's environmental health is a very important issue meriting the CEC's continuing attention;

UNDERSTANDING that children's health and the environment is a broad, cross-cutting issue touching most, if not all, of the CEC's program of work;

SEEKING to build on the Children's Health and the Environment initiative to enhance synergies and linkages between health and environmental sectors, within and outside of government;

AWARE that the Expert Advisory Board on Children's Health and the Environment in North America will be providing its detailed advice to Council;

JPAC offers the following recommendations:

- That a children's health focus be fully integrated into the work of the CEC, particularly in the Pollutants and Health program area. Among others, the following activities or features should be included:
 1. Development of a systematic approach for effectively linking children's health with broader issues related to the health effects and risks of pollutants and toxic substances;
 2. New North American Regional Action Plans (NARAPs) should identify the status of current data and discuss the risks to children's health. It is also considered very important that the NARAP on monitoring and assessment, currently under development, contain these features;

3. Future work on lead, mercury, particulates and diesel fuel emissions should incorporate the need to better understand and prevent or reduce effects on children's health and other vulnerable groups, and continue to build on work already underway;
4. Consider a focus on children at higher risk, such as indigenous children and children of migrant farm workers;
5. Risks and exposure to children should be incorporated into the substance selection criteria for candidate chemicals that are considered for future NARAPs;
6. Support the publication of a special report on toxics and children's environmental health as part of the *Taking Stock* series (currently in preparation) to inform policy makers and increase public awareness in North America; and
7. Capitalize on the experiences gained through the North American Fund for Environmental Cooperation (NAFEC) projects in particular those on Children's Health focus.

Regarding further development of the Cooperative Agenda for Children's Health and the Environment in North America, JPAC recommends the following:

- The precautionary principle should guide the work on children's health and the environment;
- There should be increased efforts to coordinate with other groups, agencies or institutions doing related work providing value-added to the work of the CEC and reducing duplication. This may be particularly relevant in the area of pesticides, bio-monitoring and health surveillance;
- Encourage the development of a common North American data base on children's health and the environment;
- Efforts should be made to identify target audiences for education, capacity building and training activities, for example, health advocates and other 'front line' workers;
- Indoor air quality issues should feature in the work, particularly in buildings where children congregate; and
- Focus on remediation and preventing exposure even in absence of full scientific certainty.

On related matters, JPAC further recommends the following:

- Authorize the development of a NARAP for lead as previously recommended by JPAC in Advice to Council 00-06;
- Include children's health when building the CEC's agenda on water;
- Explore the opportunities to link children's environmental health issues with the work program of the Enforcement Working Group;
- Invite the Expert Advisory Board to attend the June 2002 Council Session to present the results of their work to date, and to share their views with Council to refine and reinforce priority issues and directions for future work;
- Encourage broad participation in the work plan, beyond government officials, to benefit from the wide range of medical, research, educational and policy expertise available among NGOs, the North American community and beyond, for example, expertise related to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a start, Council should consider broadening the Trilateral Children's Environmental Health Team; and
- Allocate additional financial resources to fulfill this ambitious cooperative agenda.

APPROVED ON 8 MARCH 2002