



On November 19th 2008 WORLD COPD DAY (see <http://www.goldcopd.com/>)

Dear Ministers of Health and Environment,

RE: New Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe and people with respiratory diseases

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) is a European network of patient organizations that was founded in 1991. Its creation was prompted by the belief that an international organization formed by European patients' associations that share the same aims would be a more effective way to serve the needs and safeguard the rights of patients and their carers.

According to WHO, asthma is the most frequent chronic disease in childhood and every hour at least one person dies of asthma in Western Europe¹. One in four Europeans has some form of respiratory allergy² and experts estimate that by 2015, one in two Europeans are likely to suffer from at least one form of allergy. 4-10 percent of European adults are affected by COPD, the only leading cause of death that is increasing in prevalence in the world, and due to become the third most common cause by 2020.³

The entry into force of the new ambient air quality directive (2008/50/EC) could bring significant benefits to the well being and quality of life to people with allergy, asthma and COPD if it is effectively implemented with full public participation and involvement of groups most at risk from poor air quality. In fact one of the top three wishes of people with severe asthma is to be able to breathe clean air⁴. Thus, EFA would like to ensure that those most susceptible to air pollution make the fullest use of the provisions under the new air quality directive, and is carrying out a project called ***Communicating EU air quality information and alerts to allergy, asthma and COPD patients in Europe***, to help our country partners understand and participate in the implementation, in partnership with the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL).

Today, World COPD Day, we are launching a new website "*Know Your Air for Health*": www.knowyourairforhealth.org where allergy, asthma and COPD patients can find more information about levels of air pollution in their countries or when they travel.

In order to accurately describe the provisions of the new directive and what we as patients' groups can do at national level, we would greatly appreciate your view and help with ensuring that the directive can be used most effectively to protect the health of sensitive groups from ambient air pollution.

1. EFA members (please find list in annex) are considered to be (see also EFA overall mission, objectives and values attached), "*organisations representing the interests of sensitive populations*", under Article 29 of the directive on public information and therefore require special attention under the current Directive.

¹ World Health Report 2003, Shaping the Future. World Health Organisation.

² National Prevalence of Respiratory Allergic Disorders. R. Dahl et al. *Respir Med* (2004) 98, 398-403

³ European Lung White Book. European Lung Foundation and European Respiratory Society. 2003.

⁴ Dockrell M et al. *The limitations of severe asthma: the results of a European Survey. Allergy* 2007;62:134-141

2. Therefore, information provided to EFA members and to susceptible individuals should be in accordance with Annex XVI paragraph 4, and include information that will be specific to people with respiratory diseases, their carers and also targeting children with respiratory allergy and asthma.
3. In the spirit of the directive and its public information requirement to provide the information “free of charge” (Article 29) and in line with the Aarhus Convention, EFA recommends to member states and public authorities to identify groups and organizations representing the interests of sensitive populations and aid them both technically and financially in the use, interpretation and most importantly dissemination of information to these groups. In this regard EFA and its national organisations remain at your service.

Finally, EFA would like to thank you in advance for any assistance in achieving a better quality of life for our members, their carers and reducing the burden born by our health services. Indeed, you will find that by protecting those most vulnerable there will inevitably be benefits for the public at large.

Yours Sincerely,



Acting President
Marianella Salapatas



Executive Officer
Susanna Palkonen