



## PRESS RELEASE

### Will Europe miss a chance for clean and healthy air?

Brussels – 23 October 2005 Today, European Health and Environment Ministers have one of their biggest opportunities ever to affect the future health and well being of European citizens. They will be meeting in Luxembourg to formulate a "Common Position" on European Union Health Air Quality Standards.

Three leading European public health groups are united in their conviction of the supreme importance of this legislation for future health. The Health and Environment Alliance, European Public Health Alliance and the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Disease Patients Association wrote to Ministers on 5 October urgently asking them to back air quality improvements proposed in legislation currently under discussion. (1)

"This legislation is one of the most important pieces of environmental legislation benefiting health that the European Community has ever produced," according to Génon Jensen, Executive Director, Health and Environment Alliance.

The joint letter from the health groups to the Ministers quotes Dr Maria Neira, WHO Director of Public Health and the Environment, who says strong regulation can prevent as many as one in six future deaths. "By reducing particulate matter (PM) pollution from 70 to 20 micrograms per cubic metre, we estimate that we can cut deaths by around 15%." Her statement is based on brand new WHO guidelines produced with the help of 80 international experts.(2)

The health groups are asking that Ministers vote for the Commission's original proposals and ignore the amendments proposed by the European Parliament last week that would weaken the proposed legislation. For example, MEPs weakened a proposed PM10 daily limit value of 50 ug/m3 by voting to increase the number of times it could be exceeded from 35 to 55 days per year. They also voted to allow member states to postpone compliance with existing limit values on air pollutants for up to four years beyond 2010.

The health groups are adamant that there should be no roll-back of existing standards, particularly for PM10. They also believe that legally binding standards for PM2.5 should be introduced in line with WHO air quality guidelines.

Good air quality is important for everyone, but especially those with breathing difficulties.

"People with asthma tell us that busy, polluted streets are a particularly uncomfortable environment. Poor air quality may even force them into taking their cars, paradoxically worsening pollution and depriving them of the exercise that could help them manage their asthma better. A recent study showed that more than one in three asthmatics are discouraged from walking or shopping in congested areas," says Martin Dockrell of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) and Asthma UK.

#### Notes for journalists

1. Joint NGO letter to EU Health and Environment Ministers – attached
2. WHO guidelines on air quality – attached

#### Health & Environment Alliance (HEAL)

The Health & Environment Alliance advocates protection of the environment as a means to improving the health and well being for European citizens. Launched in 2004, it brings together groups that want to ensure that health is at the centre of environment issues.

Member groups include NGOs specialising in public health, environment-related health conditions and women's environmental and health concerns and associations representing health care and environmental health professionals. One of HEAL's key objectives is to bring health expertise to the environment policy-making process.

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**European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)**

The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) represents over 100 non-governmental and other not-for-profit organisations working on public health in Europe. EPHA's mission is to promote and protect the health of all people living in Europe and advocate greater participation of citizens in health-related policy making at the European level.

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**European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA)**

EFA is a collaborative Network of allergy, asthma and COPD patient associations in Europe with the mission to improve the Quality of Life of people with Allergy, Asthma and COPD and of their carers throughout Europe.

EFA Vision is a European Community that shares the responsibilities for substantially reducing the frequency and severity of Allergies, Asthma and COPD and recognises their social environmental, economic and health implications.

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**European Public Health Alliance - Environment Network** is an international non-governmental organizations advocating environmental protection as a means to improving health and well-being.