



Collaborative on Health and the Environment eNewsletter - July 2014

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Depressed? Maybe It's in the Air

Elise Miller, MEd, CHE Director

When I spoke with a colleague earlier this week, she said, "Just breathing this air makes me depressed." She lives in an urban area where high temperatures and heavy smog are the norm at this time of year. I don't think she meant she was clinically depressed, but her remark may have some physiological truth in it.

Until just recently, most of the research on air pollution has looked at associations with respiratory concerns. Just last week CHE hosted a call on air pollution and asthma [see: [Breathing Deep: Air Pollution, Health, and Public Health Policy](#)]. But more recently studies have found links to other health outcomes - including cardiovascular disease, diabetes/obesity, cognitive function, and yes, mental illness.

Last month, a new study suggested that [exposure to air pollution in early life may contribute to the onset of schizophrenia and autism](#). Other research has shown that air pollution may be associated with depression [see: [Air Pollution Linked to Learning and Memory Problems, Depression](#) and [Smog in our Brains](#)].

These are very preliminary findings, but coupled with studies on the [impact pesticide exposure \(some airborne\) on the neurocognitive function and mental health of farm workers](#), it is clear this is an area of research that needs further exploration. And I would say the need is rather urgent, given these statistics:

- [Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide](#), followed by anxiety.
- It is estimated that up to [1 out of 5 children in the United States experience a mental disorder](#) in a given year and an estimated \$247 billion is spent each year on childhood mental disorders.
- Cumulative mental health issues--depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, among others--[cost the U.S. economy about a half-trillion dollars](#).

Even if air pollution only contributes to a small fraction of mental illness, can you imagine what cleaner air would do to reduce those rates of disease and costs to the economy, not to mention the emotional toll on so many people, including their families and friends? Even the suggestion that this is an issue of 'jobs vs. the environment' seems almost laughable, if it weren't so tragic. If people don't have clean air, then they may not be able to work because they're either too depressed, in the emergency room with an asthma attack, or disabled by cardiovascular disease. It's that simple. In this country we may be able to point to having higher air quality than 30 years ago, but as more coal plants are being built in China and more diesel cars and trucks are on the road in India, we are all impacted more than ever before and likely more than we even realize.

I applaud those of you, both in this country and abroad, who are focused on reducing air pollution in a number of important ways--from promoting the development of renewable energy technologies to pressing for stronger regulatory actions. May your initiatives and our collective efforts prevail. And in the meanwhile, I hope all of you are able to take some time away from your desks this summer to be in nature where the breathing is easy--or at least, easier.

CHE Partnership Calls

CHE takes a summer break from both hosting Partnership calls and distributing our e-newsletter in August. We will resume calls and the e-newsletter in September. Information for upcoming calls will be available on CHE's website in the coming weeks, and will be emailed to all Partners. As always, we invite you to get caught up on all the calls CHE has already hosted in 2014 by visiting the [call archives](#) and listening to the MP3 recordings. The most recent calls are listed below. We hope everyone has a safe and healthy summer.

Resources from recent CHE calls:

If you missed any of the following CHE calls, you may listen to MP3 recordings and find

supporting materials at the following links:

- July 10, 2014 - [Breathing Deep: Air Pollution, Health, and Public Health Policy](#)
- June 18, 2014 - [Prenatal Exposure to EDCs and Obesity: Combining Toxicology and Epidemiology with Dr. Juliette Legler](#)
- June 17, 2014 - [Nutrition and Toxicants in Autoimmune Disease: Implications for Prevention and Treatment](#)
- June 12, 2014 - [Using Cumulative Impacts Analysis to Protect Public Health with Dr. Peter Montague](#)

You can subscribe via podcast to receive notifications of new call recordings added to the CHE archives. [View a list of past calls and subscribe to the podcast.](#)

CHE Working and Regional Group Updates

Special announcement: CHE will be reformatting its monthly e-newsletter over the coming months, aiming to make it more reader-friendly, particularly for mobile devices, and better connecting it to our website and social media. Please note that this month instead of multiple items listed for each working group, we have included the top news highlight and then provided a link to the working group page where you will find additional news items of interest.

CHE Asthma

~ coordinated by Génon Jensen, info@healthandenvironment.org

~ Environmental Council discusses the EU clean air package

At the recent meeting of EU environment ministers, an exchange was held on proposed measures to improve air quality in Europe. HEAL is concerned by the low level of ambition expressed by some member states.

[Read more](#)

See more [asthma and environmental health news highlights](#)

CHE Breast Cancer

~ coordinated by Michael Lerner and Jeanne Rizzo, info@healthandenvironment.org

~ Health infographics connecting chronic disease to environmental factors

[Oregon Environmental Council offers infographics](#) that connect chronic disease to environmental factors. Each visual resource is accompanied by a white paper with citations. You are welcome to share the breast cancer and asthma infographics, and stay tuned for more on Parkinson's Disease, heart disease and other chronic conditions.

See more [breast cancer and environmental health news highlights](#)

CHE Initiative on Children's Environmental Health

~ coordinated by Elise Miller, info@healthandenvironment.org

~ Pediatric Environmental Health Toolkit updated

[The Pediatric Environmental Health Toolkit online training course module](#) has been updated and re-accredited and offers free CE credits to a range of health professions. The course offers healthcare providers detailed examples about how to best deliver anticipatory guidance on a range of environmental health issues, especially during well-child visits. Its engaging format includes case studies, animations and other resources. Originally developed by ATSDR's Division of Toxicology and Environmental Medicine (DTEM), Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), and the University of California-San Francisco PEHSU, this well-received course has been taken by over 2000 health professionals over the past several years. It takes about 90 minutes to complete, and can be paused and resumed later at your convenience.

See more [children's environmental health news highlights](#)

CHE Climate Change

~ coordinated by Génon Jensen, info@healthandenvironment.org

~ Emissions Performance Standard (EPS): A key to countering the EU's coal addiction

HEAL contributed to a joint position paper on how the EU needs an Emissions Performance Standard (EPS) for CO2 from power plants as it will prevent lock-in to the worst-polluting infrastructure. It will also provide a clear investment signal for the decarbonization of the sector by complementing the Emission Trading System (ETS), and binding climate, renewable energy and efficiency targets. In this way, the EU 2030 climate and energy framework will provide regulatory certainty for all market actors throughout the EU. Europe needs instruments that solve the problem of carbon pollution in reality, not theory.

[Read the paper](#)

See more [climate change and environmental health news highlights](#)

CHE Diabetes-Obesity

~ coordinated by Sarah Howard, sarhow@gmail.com

~ Exposure during development and diabetes/obesity

Numerous studies have found that prenatal exposures to a variety of factors--from chemicals to nutrition--can influence the offspring's later risk of diabetes or obesity, and other factors relating to growth. For example, a [new study from the Netherlands](#) finds that prenatal exposure to phthalates and DDE is associated with body mass index (BMI) as well as with head circumference during the first year after birth.

For additional studies on developmental exposures and diabetes/obesity, see this [PubMed collection on Developmental Exposures and Diabetes/Obesity](#).

See more [diabetes, obesity, and environmental health news highlights](#)

CHE Working Group on Electromagnetic Fields

~ coordinated by Antoinette Stein, tweil@igc.org

~ Scientists call on government to protect public from wireless radiation exposure

More than 50 scientists from 18 nations called on government to minimize the public's exposure to the radiation emitted by wireless devices including cell and cordless phones, Wi-Fi, smart meters, and baby monitors.

[Read more](#)

See more [EMF and environmental health news highlights](#)

CHE Fertility and Reproductive Health

~ coordinated by Karin Russ, karin@healthandenvironment.org

~ Study examines counseling patients on preventing prenatal environmental exposures

An [online survey of over 2,500 obstetricians](#) examined their attitudes and practices in counseling clients to avoid prenatal environmental exposures. The majority (78%) agreed that counseling patients is an effective means to reduce patient exposure to environmental health hazards. However, less than 20% reported routinely asking about common environmental exposures, and only 1 in 15 reported any training on the topic. This assessment represents a significant gap in the knowledge base of clinicians and provides strong rationale for additional training in reproductive environmental health.

See more [fertility, reproductive health, and environmental health news highlights](#)

CHE Healthy Aging and the Environment Initiative

~ coordinated by Maria Valenti, mvalenti@igc.org

~ Two recent reports from the U.S. Census Bureau on our Aging Population

[An Aging Nation: The Older Population in the United States](#), looks at the demographic changes to the 65-and-older population that will comprise 21 percent of the US population in 2050 and the impact that these changes will have on the composition of the total population. A second report, [The Baby Boom Cohort in the United States: 2012 to 2060](#), focuses on the shifting size and structure of the baby boom population. These briefs use data from the 2012 national projections of the US population.

See more [healthy aging and the environment news highlights](#)

CHE Mental Health

~ coordinated by Elise Miller, info@healthandenvironment.org

Drought as a mental health exposure

The mental health impact of drought is poorly quantified and no previous research has demonstrated a relationship between distress and explicit environmentally based measures of drought. With continuing climate change, it is important to understand what drought is and how it may affect the mental health. [This study](#) quantified drought in terms of duration and intensity of relative dryness and identified drought characteristics associated with poor mental health to evaluate any vulnerability in rural and urban communities.

See more [mental health and environment news highlights](#)

CHE Regional Working Groups

CHE Alaska

~ coordinated by Pamela Miller, pamela@akaction.org

~ Working Group call: Ontario's 'Chemical Valley' and the Aamjiwnaang First Nation

Wednesday July 30, 2014 at 9:00 am Alaska/10:00 am Pacific/1:00 pm Eastern

Ron Plain is a member of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, a native community in the heart of Ontario's notorious "Chemical Valley" near Sarnia. Forty percent of Canada's petrochemical industry operates within a few kilometers of Aamjiwnaang. With the worst air in Canada, Aamjiwnaang residents continue to be exposed to a range of harmful pollutants and suffer from health problems including high levels of cancer, asthma, and miscarried pregnancies. They also have an alarmingly low number of baby boys being born: since the early 1990s, the number of boys born dropped from a normal ratio of roughly half of

all births to about one-third. Researchers suspect the change may be caused by exposure to chemicals that have disrupted people's reproductive systems. Ron Plain will discuss the ongoing industrial contamination in his community, the rise of a local environmental health and justice movement over the last decade and the current court case in which he and Ada Lockridge (also a member of Aamjiwnaang First Nation) are arguing the Ontario government is violating their basic human rights to equality and to life, liberty, and security of person.

For more information or to sign up for this free, one-hour teleconference, please contact Diana at diana@akaction.org

See more [news highlights from CHE Alaska](#)

CHE HEAL

~ coordinated by Lisette van Vliet, lisette@env-health.org

~ **Health cost in the European Union: How much is related to EDCs?** Exposure to food and everyday electronic, cosmetic and plastic products containing endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) may be costing up to €31 billion per year in the EU, according to a [new HEAL report](#).

[Download the full report](#)

[Download the press release](#)

See more [news highlights from CHE's European partners at HEAL](#)

CHE Washington

~ coordinated by Aimee Boulanger and Steve Gilbert, info@healthandenvironment.org

~ **CHE-WA Children's Environmental Health Working Group**

This group will not host a monthly meeting in August. The next meeting will take place September 11, 2014, from 9:30-11:30 am Pacific at the University of Washington Center for Ecogenetics. Meredith Li-Vollmer from Public Health-Seattle and King County will speak at the September meeting on risk communication during disasters. Details will be

emailed to CHE Washington Working Group participants.

See more [news highlights from CHE Washington](#)

Announcements and News Highlights

EPA seeking comment on Clean Power Plan

President Obama has announced a major climate-related policy action--the proposed [EPA Clean Power Plan](#), which sets carbon pollution limits on all existing power plants. Power plants are America's single largest source of carbon pollution. The EPA is holding a public hearing on the plan in cities across the country the week of July 28th. Sign up [here](#) to make a brief statement related to cutting dangerous carbon pollution, or email Pamela Garrett at the EPA, garrett.pamela@epa.gov.

Call for abstracts: PPTOX IV

This year's conference theme is "Environmental Stressors in Disease and Implications for Human Health." Abstracts will be accepted through August 18, 2014.

[Read more](#)

[Environmental Health News](#) (EHN) and its sister site, [The Daily Climate](#), offer a wealth of valuable information each day at no cost to subscribers.

July 2014 issue of [Environmental Health Perspectives](#) available online

July 2014 issue of [Environmental Factor](#) available online

CHE maintains a [news feed](#) of environmental health related news announcements and events collected from a multitude of sources on CHE's website.

Reports, Resources, and Other Updates

CDC updates report on human environmental exposure to chemicals

[*The Fourth National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals, Updated Tables, July 2014*](#) provides new data since the release of the Fourth Report, 2009. Since the publication of the Fourth Report, 210 chemicals have been updated and data on 88 chemicals have been added. Review this publication for the most recent and complete biomonitoring data.

New database of environmental health and chemicals

The European Environmental Bureau has developed together with ISTAS (Spanish trade union's institute for health and environment) the [Risctox database](#) on over 100,000 toxic and hazardous substances, commissioned by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI). RISCTOX provide information about health and environmental risks caused by chemicals contained in products.

CHE lists hundreds of reports, books, videos, databases, and other resources in a searchable [Portal to Science](#) on CHE's website.

Thank you for taking the time to read the latest about CHE. As always, we welcome your questions and suggestions. Please direct comments to Elise Miller, Director of CHE, at elise@healthandenvironment.org

Best wishes,

Elise Miller, MEd, Director

Steve Heilig, Director of Public Health and Education at San Francisco Medical Society and CHE

Erika Sanders, Administrative Coordinator

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