

NOTES AND NEWS

World Health Organization Establishes New Office in Bonn

On 8 March 2001, the German Ambassador Dreher and Dr Marc Danzon, Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO EURO), signed an agreement in Copenhagen, Denmark, on the establishment of a new WHO EURO office in Bonn, Germany. The new office started work in Bonn on 12 March 2001, with a workshop on "Health and Environment Information Systems". The office is part of the European Centre for Environment and Health of WHO. It has its seat in the "Bundeshaus" (Hermann-Ehlers-Str. 10, 53113 Bonn, Germany) where the Members of Parliament had their offices before the German Government moved to Berlin. It is planned to employ about 20 staff members.

The WHO Bonn office is the technical and scientific unit of the WHO Environment and Health Programme, with a clear regional focus. It supports, at the same time, the global aims of WHO. The office will provide expert knowledge for the region and foster the development of effective environment and health policies based on scientific knowledge. At the beginning of its first working period, emphasis will be laid on the topic urban environment with special focus on population groups particularly affected by environmental health.

WHO in Bonn will concentrate on the following working areas:

1. Air quality – air pollution in urban areas, air pollution in buildings, schools and in work places
2. Noise pollution
3. Housing and the environment – construction of buildings, building materials and urban infrastructures

The German Government has provided from the budget of its Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety a single payment of one million DM in 2001 for the establishment of the WHO Bonn office. An additional sum of 2 million DM will be supplied as a voluntary contribution to WHO annually, determined for the purpose of supporting the Bonn office.

Federal Environment Minister Trittin said: "The establishment of the WHO office in Bonn expresses the reinforced engagement of the German Government in the United Nations, especially in global health and environment issues. For Germany, the foundation of this office is a further step towards the establishment of international institutions in Bonn, in order give this town a new, attractive profile and continuing its development into a centre for international co-operation, particularly in environment and health affairs."

Source: Press Release of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, of 12 March 2001

Survey of Allergies and Respiratory Diseases in Aachen District, Germany

The collection and assessment of environmental health data is an essential task of public health services, and in the frame of public health documentation and reporting it can provide an information basis for health policies decision making. The resolution of the 8th Regional Conference on Public Health of 16 June 1999 on "Health Preservation for Children and Teenagers in North Rhine-Westfalia" pointed out that health

preservation, particularly for children and teenagers, is a public health concern of high priority.

For more than five years, the public health department of Aachen district, together with the Institute for Hygiene and Environmental Medicine of the Technical University of Aachen, conducted investigations via questionnaire survey of all 6- and 7-year old children in order to determine

occurrences of allergies, respiratory diseases and complaints. The survey aimed at an overview of the state of health of the population living in the region of the Aachen public health department. Especially of interest were the spatial distributions and trends of diseases. The investigation served exclusively for the estimation of the frequencies of diseases. It did not deal with causes of diseases.

The results of the survey showed that in two sub-districts the frequencies of diseases and complaints were higher compared to other sub-districts. As a consequence, an epidemiological study of environmental factors has been carried out in 2000, in order to investigate the causes of the relatively high frequencies of diseases and complaints in some areas. As the region of investigation is structured heterogeneously, causes may also be diverse. Associations between this type of diseases and complaints on the one hand and effects of air pollution on the other hand have, however, already been established before and have been reported widely.

There are large industrial enterprises in the district, among others heavy metal smelting and industries, chemicals and pharmaceuticals producers, power plants and cable production.

In other parts of the district, coal mining predominated in the past. At present, a reorientation process is taking place followed by the settlement of mostly smaller or medium-sized enterprises working in different areas, as there are: medical, bio- and measurement techniques, technologies development and microelectronics.

In February and March 2000, altogether 654 children participated in the study, from two conspicuous sub-districts and another district that served as a control group. Allergological investigations ("skin-prick tests") and an extended questionnaire will help to find the causes of relatively elevated frequencies of diseases and complaints.

The study is presently in the data analysis. Results will be published in the middle of 2001. In the long term, preventive medical strategies should be developed and put into practice on the local level in order to reduce the frequency of allergies, as well as respiratory diseases and complaints.

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Map 1: Aachen District – the Survey Area

