

What's New?

Keep up to date with new initiatives and activities that are fostering research and practice pertinent to EcoHealth readers. In this issue, you can find out about:

- New Study Released: Climate Change and Human Health—Risks and Responses
- Center for International Forestry Research: Forest and Health Initiative
- The Wildlife Trade and Emerging Diseases: New Initiatives to Respond to a Conservation Medicine Challenge
- Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety: Forum IV

NEW STUDY RELEASED: CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN HEALTH—RISKS AND RESPONSES

A new study on the links between climate change and human health was launched in December 2003. The study is authored by the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), with the support of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Climate Change and Human Health—Risks and Responses describes the context and process of global climate change, its actual or likely impacts on health, and how human societies and their governments should respond, with particular focus on the health sector. The study examines the major ways in which weather, air pollution, and water and food contamination affect the way diseases emerge. The importance and implications of the study are highlighted by evidence that ranges from the finding that the 1990s were the hottest decade on record; that an esti-

mated 20,000 people died in Europe due to extreme heat temperatures in the summer of 2003; and that there is a relationship between increased disease vector habitat and extreme rainfall events. The study notes that most of the health impacts of climate change would be adverse, and suggests effective means for all countries to monitor and control the health effects of climate change.

In addition, the European Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO-EURO) together with Health Canada, and with the support of UNEP and WMO, are launching the guidelines entitled *Methods of Assessing Human Health Vulnerability and Public Health Adaptation to Climate Change*. The guidelines complement the book and are designed to help governments and other organizations to assess vulnerability and adaptation to climate variability and change at the regional, national, and local levels. Flexible methods and tools are described to take action to minimize current and future vulnerability of specific populations.

Copies of the book *Climate Change and Human Health—Risks and Responses* can be ordered at <http://bookorders.who.int>. A book summary and copies of *Methods of Assessing Human Health Vulnerability and Public Health Adaptation to Climate Change* can be found at <http://www.who.int/globalchange>

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY RESEARCH: FOREST AND HEALTH INITIATIVE

A meeting sponsored by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR, <http://www.cifor.cgiar.org>) on the role of forest ecosystems in human health was held in Bogor, Indonesia, October 6–8, 2003. Participants at the workshop included researchers from CIFOR's three programs: Livelihoods, Environmental Services, and Governance as well as

three invited participants representing the fields of ethnobotany, medical anthropology, ecology, and economics.

The meeting served as a platform for collaborating scientists to share their expertise on the links between forests and human health, and develop a research agenda to better understand the public health contribution of forests (focus was on the value of wild and cultivated plants as foods and medicines); the impact of forest cover change on health (focus was on the positive and negative links between land use change and vector borne diseases); and the potential of integrating environmental and population/health efforts.

A few of the issues identified by researchers as meriting further attention are: the impact of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) on land use and farming systems; identification and integration of safe and effective local plant therapies into public health promotion and delivery efforts; and examining the link between forest stewardship, population change, and enhanced gender equity for improving the health of ecosystems and people.

The group is planning an expanded follow-up workshop in 2004 to be held in association with the University of Hawaii's Division of Ecology and Health (John A. Burns School of Medicine) and ethnobotany faculty (Botany and Anthropology Departments). Longer term goals are to produce a book on forest and woodland ecosystems and human health, and develop projects that integrate health care and conservation efforts in light of research results.

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THE WILDLIFE TRADE AND EMERGING DISEASES: NEW INITIATIVES TO RESPOND TO A CONSERVATION MEDICINE CHALLENGE

The introduction of disease through human activities ("pathogen pollution") is possibly the major force driving the emergence of new diseases in humans, wildlife, and plants. Introduced diseases such as West Nile encephalitis, SARS, and monkeypox represent a growing threat to public health, while the trades that drive them have major conservation consequences to wildlife.

Yet stemming the international flow of wildlife and their pathogens is a tough challenge. First, the wildlife trade is a \$2

billion dollar industry (half illegal) in the USA alone, only surpassed by the traffic of drugs and guns, while the illegal trade in Brazil surpasses the \$2 billion mark. Second, the drivers of international trade are on the rise. Global air travel has outstripped the average global growth in gross domestic product over the past 15 years by almost double. The steady rise in global air travel over the last 25 years is predicted to continue, creating new routes for both the wildlife trade and the globalization of pathogens.

January 2004 has heralded two important initiatives to combat this dual threat to health and conservation:

- The Wildlife Trust Alliance (an international group of conservation institutions) has convened a meeting in Bangalore, India to call for the end of the trade in wildlife for reasons of conservation and public health (<http://www.wildlifetrust.org>).
- On a more local scale, a 2-day workshop in Hawaii formulated a plan to prevent the introduction of West Nile virus as a public health measure and to protect Hawaii's highly endangered avifauna (<http://refuges.fws.gov/habitats/westNileVirusHawaii.html>).

These efforts underpin a new approach to health and conservation that strives for a planet free of pathogen pollution and recognizes that the potential health costs of the wildlife trade, legal or illegal, are not worth the profits made in fostering a frivolous hobby or an unusual meal.

For more information regarding these initiatives, visit <http://www.wildlifetrust.org>; contact Alonso Aguirre, e-mail: aguirre@wildlifetrust.org; or Peter Daszak, e-mail: daszak@conservationmedicine.org

INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON CHEMICAL SAFETY: FORUM IV

The Fourth Session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS Forum IV) was held November 1–7, 2003 in Bangkok, Thailand. Over 500 participants representing over 125 governments, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and industry were in attendance.

Forum IV took stock of progress achieved in ensuring that chemicals are produced, transported, used, and disposed of throughout their life-cycle in ways that are protective of human health and the environment. Participants focused on topics and set priorities for action relating to:

children and chemical safety; occupational safety and health; hazard data generation and availability; acutely toxic pesticides; and capacity building. Recommendations were also developed for action on the globally harmonized system for the classification and labeling of chemicals and the prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products.

IFCS Forum V will take place in the second half of 2006 in Hungary. The IFCS is a broad-based alliance of all stakeholders concerned with the sound management of chemicals. It operates on the basis of full and open participation of all

partners, offering representatives the opportunity to meet to build partnerships, provide advice and guidance, make recommendations, and monitor progress.

For a summary of the results of Forum IV, please visit the IFCS website at: <http://www.ifcs.ch> Contact: IFCS Secretariat, c/o World Health Organization, 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland; telephone, 41-22-791-3650; fax, 41-22-791-4875; website, <http://www.ifcs.ch>

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