



2nd Lustrum Symposium on Vulnerable Groups **November 27, 2004, Zeist, Netherlands**

On occasion of its 10th anniversary, MNGM, the Monitoring Network for Health and environment organised a symposium on vulnerable groups. Invited speakers included researchers and clinicians, as well as a forum of environment and health NGOs, research institutes and occupational health. From the discussions and presentations, MNGM composed a position paper, that was circulated among attendants to the NGO Strategy Meeting “Taking the environment and health agenda forward in Europe”, December 1st 2004 in Egmond aan Zee, preceding the EU Conference on implementation of the European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010.

We asked the participants to support the statement, following below.

Twelve NGOs signed in support for the statement. A list has been attached.

MNGM Position Paper

MNGM, The Monitoring Network Health and Environment has been registering health and environment problems as reported by citizens for 10 years. In the course of our existence, there have always been reports from people who seemed more vulnerable to environmental influences than others. Some of them experience health problems due to chemical emissions from consumer products, some due to noise, and some due to electromagnetic fields, including high voltage lines, transmission stations and household gear. More and more research suggests, that the vulnerable part of the population is substantially greater than the 2-5% environmental burden of disease our governments presently presume.

- Given the alarming rise in asthma and allergies (now already 25% of the children in industry countries), it is evident that the entire population undergoes a dramatic shift in vulnerability. As a consequence, the percentage of extremely vulnerable people will increase substantially in the near future. Meaning, that current environmental standards will prove rapidly inadequate.
- The annual amount of chemicals per person we consume in Western Europe belongs to the highest in the world. Many chemicals end up in our living environment: through pesticides, perfumes, solvents, particulate matter, food and water. Many of these substances presently pollute our bodies. This must STOP.
- Neither the food industry, nor other producers of consumer goods or building materials take into account the problems of vulnerable groups. The same goes for consumers, who are not aware that their perfumed body care products, their fireplaces, barbecues and wood stoves may seriously harm allergic neighbours and colleagues.
- We feel very concerned about people suffering from MCS (multiple chemical sensitivity). Your aftershave or deodorizer may incapacitate them for days. They are the human canaries of the present world, which is rapidly becoming completely unlivable for them. They may have innate weaknesses in their bodies' ability to cope with toxic substances, but it is an acquired syndrome, following strong or prolonged exposure to chemicals. According to MCS specialist Dr. Doris Rapp, the estimated incidence of 1-16% in the USA is on the low side: rather 80-85% suffer from mild MCS symptoms.
- We also receive more and more reports from people getting ill from electromagnetic fields: from electric gear at home and at work, from

power lines and from GSM and UMTS masts, base stations and phones. Like MCS, this is a debilitating condition, and an acquired syndrome, irreversible and aggravating under repeated exposure.

- Both from MCS patients and from people reporting problems with mobile phones and other electromagnetic fields we learn, that there is a lot of overlap between people suffering from MCS, EMF, chronic fatigue and food intolerance.
- Also environmental smell and noise are more than a nuisance, they do make people actually sick. Complaints are often ignored, blamed on the victims, or taken as the inevitable price of economic development.

Therefore, we call on the Dutch presidency, the European ministers and the European Commission to:

1. Acknowledge the importance of registrations, such as collected by MNGM as important indicators and early warning signs.
2. Take strong measures to prevent exposure to solvents, fragrances, fire retardants, wood smoke and pesticides indoors and outdoors.
3. Strengthen REACH. We endorse the five key points stressed by the joint NGOs. In addition we recommend to bring all inhalable and fat-soluble substances under the category of 'very high concern', since these substances easily enter the body and can pass the placenta and the blood-brain barrier.
4. Assess and address the differential environmental needs of specific vulnerable groups, such as children and pregnant women, atopic and hypersensitive patients, people suffering from cancer, COPD and metabolic disorders and elderly people.
5. Tailor environmental standards to the most vulnerable group, bearing in mind that many substances can disrupt normal development of our children.
6. Make more space for vulnerable groups in creating conditions conducive to the production of chemicals-free food, air, water, clothing, upholstery, buildings, especially hospitals and resorts for a toxic and EMF-free holiday.
7. Promote research into pathogenesis, pathophysiology and treatment of emergent environmental diseases, such as MCS and electrosensitivity.

NGOs supporting MNGM's position paper

ANPED, the Northern Alliance for Sustainability	M. Butter
European Academy for Environmental Medicine	P. Ohnsorge
Green Factors - ISDE Ukrain	L. Gerbilsky
Sustainable World Foundation	A. Yoveva
WECF, Women in Europe for a Common Future	M. Kranendonk, I. Van Overbeeke
ISDE Austria	H. Moshammer
CAAG, Hungary	S. Gergoty
Clean-up Greece	C. Monolopoulou
European Environmental Bureau	C. Depuydt
IBFAN	M. Lehnert
Network Children's Health and Environment Germany	E. Petersen
HECTOR	M.C. Dewolf