

26 September 2021 – WHO, the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme and UNICEF have partnered to create a new compendium of 500 actions aimed at reducing death and diseases driven by environmental risk factors, the first such resource to unite this expertise from across the United Nations system.

Environmental pollution and other environmental risks cause 24% of deaths through, for example, heart disease, stroke, poisonings, traffic accidents, and others. This toll could be substantially reduced – even eliminated – through bold preventive action at national, regional, local, and sector-specific levels.

The compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health and environment provides easy access to practical actions for practitioners to scale up efforts to create healthy environments that prevent disease. It is designed for policy-makers, staff in government ministries, local government, in-country UN personnel and other decision-makers.

The repository presents actions and recommendations to address a comprehensive range of environmental risk factors to health, such as air pollution, unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene, climate and ecosystem change, chemicals, radiation, and occupational risks, among others.

Air pollution alone leads to 7 million deaths each year, while climate change is expected to contribute increasingly to a broad range of health impacts, both directly and indirectly through effects on biodiversity.

The compendium, which is accessible via interactive webpages on the WHO website and as a PDF for offline reference, also addresses priority settings for action, such as cities and urban settlements, as well as cross-cutting topics like children's environmental health.

Two thirds of deaths attributed to environmental risk factors are from non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease, stroke and cancer, making the actions in the compendium a crucial part of addressing the NCD epidemic.

The compendium can also play an important role in achieving health equity, as low- and middle-income countries bear the greatest environmental burden in all types of diseases and injuries.

The compendium is a “living” repository, subject to updates and new guidance as they become available from partner organizations. Each action is briefly described and refers to the source for greater detail.

It calls for a scaling up of actions in countries by ministries of health and others at national, regional, local levels, with each of the outlined interventions classified according to principally involved sectors, level of implementation and necessary instruments, such as regulation, taxes and subsidies, infrastructure, education, communication, and others.

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