

NIEHS joins WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network meeting

By Tara Failey

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 25 percent of the global burden of disease is linked to environmental factors. With support from NIEHS, the organization held its first [Chemical Risk Assessment Network](http://www.who.int/ipcs/network/en/) meeting Oct. 8-10 in Paris, to explore and address the public health risks posed by toxic chemicals.

The meeting was hosted by the French Agency for Food, Environmental, and Occupational Health and Safety, and attendees represented more than 55 chemical risk assessment institutions from 29 countries.

Christopher Weis, Ph.D.

(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/about/od/advisor/weis/index.cfm>)

, senior advisor and toxicology liaison for the NIEHS Office of the Director, was elected to serve as a meeting co-chair by network members.

The production and use of chemicals continues to increase worldwide, making it essential to better evaluate, and minimize, exposure to toxic chemicals,” explained Weis. “This global network will join forces to fine-tune chemical risk assessment, working to safeguard human health.”

Keeping health at the forefront

Representatives of agencies, academic groups, and nongovernmental organizations, at the meeting, explored a variety of risk assessment challenges. These included identification of emerging risks, characterization of uncertainty in risk assessment, means to scale up capacity building, and establishment of a common understanding of systematic literature review of toxicological data.

The meeting’s keynote speaker was Kenneth Olden, Ph.D., former NIEHS director and current director of the Environmental Protection Agency National Center for Environmental Assessment. Olden reminded the audience that even though risk assessments can be highly technical in terms of methodology, assessors should keep their activities focused on public health applications. Using the epigenome as an example, he outlined how environmental justice and socioeconomic status considerations can be factored into models and recommendations.

Joining Olden and Weis was Christopher Portier, Ph.D., former director of the NIEHS Office of Risk Assessment Research, who discussed the importance of systematic review for public health decision-making.

Identifying key challenges and opportunities for collaboration

Attendees found that interest in the health impacts of hydrofracturing and coordinating training needs crosses international boundaries. Working groups developed collaborative plans to address research in biomonitoring, identify high priority research and method development needs, increase and coordinate training efforts for risk assessors, and establish communication between participants.

Speakers from developing countries outlined some of their key struggles in risk assessment and regulation, including limited data relevant to actual exposures in their countries, and the unique climactic environments of many small island countries. Through breakout sessions and informal meetings, many attendees from developing countries received support, information, and additional data sources, from those who had conducted similar research elsewhere in the world.

“As we heard about the needs of developing countries, the need for dialogue and collaboration among network members became acutely apparent,” said Weis. “The work of NIEHS is extremely important, not just for our own populations, but for other agencies, countries, and researchers around the world. We are extremely excited to be a part of this network, and hope that NIEHS can learn about unique issues in environmental health, as well as provide benefit to participants.”



Weis, right, joined Sam Adu-Kumi, Ph.D., of the Ghana Environmental Protection Agency, during a break in the meeting. (Photo courtesy of Tara Failey)



Back, from left, Olden, Portier, and Weis gathered with Carolyn Vickers, front center, WHO International Programme on Chemical Safety representative. (Photo courtesy of Tara Failey)

(Tara Failey is a communication specialist with MDB Inc., contractor for the NIEHS Division of Extramural Research and Training.)

The Environmental Factor is produced monthly by the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences \(NIEHS\)](#)

(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>)

, Office of Communications and Public Liaison. The content is not copyrighted, and it can be reprinted without permission. If you use parts of Environmental Factor in your publication, we ask that you provide us with a copy for our records. We welcome your [comments and suggestions](#).
(bruskec@niehs.nih.gov)

This page URL: NIEHS website: <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>

Email the Web Manager at webmanager@niehs.nih.gov