

Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FCSD)

Opinion on the effects in Belgium of climate change

- particularly heat waves, floods and ozone pollution – on health

- **Own initiative**
- **Drafted by the *Scientific Research* working group, in collaboration with the *Energy and Climate* working group**
- **Approved by the General Meeting on 16 December 2005 (see Annex 2)**
- **Original language: Dutch**

Main points of the opinion

- [a] The Council considers it useful, following on from the call launched by the WHO Europe, to study the effects of climate change on human health that can be expected in Belgium. This opinion reviews the extent to which policy can react to the impact on health of exceptional phenomena related to climate change.
- [b] Belgium should develop a policy of adaptation to the consequences of climate change. Policy makers should devote greater attention to preventive measures so as to forestall or limit the risks to health resulting from climate change.
- [c] The Council notes that new opportunities for innovation, investment and employment can arise as a result of the adaptations needed for climate change, in the area of sustainable construction, for example.
- [d] The risks of climate change are hard to evaluate and the consequences for Belgium in terms of the impact on health have not yet been studied in detail. For that reason, the Council believes it is important to carry out studies on the following subjects, in order to give policy makers a better idea of the conceivable risks:
- a study to enhance climate projections; Belgium could possibly collaborate with existing European and international networks
 - an evaluation of present-day surveillance and early warning systems and possible comparison with best practices in other countries
 - studies linking epidemiological and socio-economic data; this would allow better identification of high-risk populations
 - systematic study of mortality and morbidity rates as a result of heat waves
 - a study on medicines, in collaboration with the pharmaceutical sector, to combat climate-sensitive tropical diseases
 - systematic data on floods in Belgium: morbidity, mortality and the costs for sickness insurance
 - the influence of climate change on the presence of allergens harmful to health, both inside homes and outside.

The Council considers that it would be appropriate for the Institute of Tropical Medicine to establish the link with climate change in its research. On the one hand, the Institute could make this expertise available to the developing countries through Belgian development cooperation. On the other, such a study could provide useful knowledge on the possible risks of climate-sensitive tropical diseases in our country.

- [e] With a view to the development of an appropriate policy, the Council considers it useful to assess existing policy measures. The existing consultation bodies must ensure a consistent transposition of international agreements and coherent policy management. The National Environment-Health Plan is the ideal policy tool for adapting environment and health policy to the health needs that will develop further to climate change.
- [f] The Council believes it would be useful to conduct a study on air conditioning systems so as to investigate the direct and indirect impact for Belgium of their use on health and the environment. To prevent health problems related to poor maintenance of air conditioning systems, the Council considers it important that certain measures be observed. The Council also deems it useful to examine for Belgium the consequences for health, both direct and indirect, of different building cooling methods.
- [g] The FCSD welcomes the fact that Belgium has already been making an effort to address the problem of tropospheric ozone for quite some time. In the light of the consequences of ozone for health, the FCSD considers particularly useful the quarterly monitoring of the Third Ozone Plan by the Council of Ministers and hopes that the Plan's actions will be implemented effectively. The FCSD believes that it would also be useful to provide information on the results of the measures introduced. The FCSD stresses the importance of implementing and abiding by international agreements and European directives on the reduction of ozone precursors.
- [h] The Council believes there is a need to encourage exchanges of information between European countries on the effects of climate change on health. The FCSD considers that Belgian development policy should contribute to the development of surveillance and early warning systems as well as adequate access to medicines.
- [i] The Council considers it essential that information be provided for citizens, in different ways and in due time, on the risks to health of floods, heat waves, ozone pollution and diseases related to climate change.