



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY

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President's Newsletter, June 2008

Tony McMichael
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Greetings to all members. This is the first of my quarterly President's newsletters for this year. It follows the very informative newsletter sent out in late March by Dan Wartenberg, Immediate Past President. Dan noted the growth in ISEE membership, now spanning over 50 countries, and in the Society's activities and opportunities (e.g., for early-career members).

I will comment briefly on some emerging ISEE activities and services, including several that Dan has already mentioned. Other items and details are posted on the regularly updated ISEE website (www.iseepi.org). First, though, it is an important time to look to wider horizons. Research and policy attention to environmental health is growing, and is doing so at several scales. So our role as researchers and practitioners faces greater expectations and challenges.

Environment and health: the international context

Governments are under widening pressures to address issues of environmental quality and sustainability. This reflects a growing public (i.e., electorate) awareness of environmental damage, both local and global, and a rising concern over the risks to health.

Foci of policy concern include these: (i) air quality is deteriorating in many industrializing countries; (ii) new infectious disease risks have recently emerged from intensified livestock production; (iii) noise and traffic hazards are rising as global car usage proliferates; (iv) lead exposure remains a widespread health hazard, especially in poorer populations; (v) persistent organic (mostly chlorinated) pollutants are spreading more widely in environments remote from source; (vi) freshwater supplies are declining in many regions; (vii) food yield and production volumes are falling in vulnerable regions; and (viii) recent evidence indicates that global climate change is occurring faster than was predicted 5-10 years ago.

This year the World Health Organization (WHO) chose, as its theme for World Health Day (April 7), *Protecting Health Against Climate Change*. This generally greater awareness of environmental issues, and threats to health, is beginning to connect with the discourse about the non-sustainable nature of many of our social, technological and economic practices. So, we have plenty of important and interesting work to do over the coming decade and beyond.

New ISEE developments

AuthorAID

The Council has worked with Dick Clapp's 'Capacity Building in Developing Countries' Committee to publicize ISEE's innovative AuthorAID scheme. Up to ten free ISEE memberships are available to researchers from developing countries who take advantage of this capacity-building program, which assists the development of a research paper for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Applications must include a complete early draft of a paper of relevance to ISEE. See the ISEE website: www.iseepi.org/AuthorAIDScholarshipAnnounce_2-08.pdf

Award for the best environmental epidemiology published paper

The Council will shortly announce the conditions and process of this new annual award (\$1000). If you (think you have) published an excellent paper, or know of another deserving winner, watch this space and the ISEE website.

Financial support for regional ISEE chapters and groups

At the Mexico City ISEE Conference, 2007, the Council agreed to offer financial support for regional chapters and groups, as small grants (~\$500-\$1000). Chapters and groups can apply to the Council for up to \$1000 for activities that will help the development of regional ISEE activities, including increasing the membership. Details on ISEE website: http://www.iseepi.org/about/ISEE_RFP_Chapters_08.pdf

Council has approved a contribution to the Central and Eastern European chapter, to support attendance and ISEE promotional activity at the Central and Eastern European Conference on Health and the Environment (CEECH), in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, October 2008.

Meanwhile, the Society welcomes the appointment of Tamar Berman and Ziad Abdeen as co-chairs of the reactivated Eastern Mediterranean Chapter. They plan to have an ISEE chapter conference within the International Neurotoxicology Conference in June 2009.

Seasonal deadlines

Rebecca James Baker Memorial Prize

The deadline for applications for the Rebecca James Baker Memorial Prize is July 1. Students and new investigators who are first authors on an accepted abstract for the ISEE-ISEA 2008 Conference this October are eligible to apply. See ISEE website for details: <http://www.iseepi.org/BakerPrize.doc>

ISEA-ISEE Conference 2008: "Exposure and Health in a Global Environment"

Registrations for this year's joint conference with the International Society for Exposure Analysis, in Pasadena, California, October 12-16, are open – see the conference website: <http://secure.awma.org/events/isee-isea>.

Specific topics to be highlighted include:

- Rapid industrialization and urban growth
- Worldwide energy demands
- Changes in manufacturing, transportation, agriculture and land use
- Epidemiological studies of population health disparities

- Differential impacts of environmental hazards in developing and industrial societies
- Changing patterns of exposures and diseases
- Susceptibilities of different populations to environmentally-linked diseases
- Role of international and multi-national population studies in environmental health

The conference will include daily plenary sessions with keynote lecturers and a variety of symposia and technical sessions for more in-depth discussion on selected topics.

Student poster competition: Details of this year's competition are on the conference website. This competition provides challenge and stimulus to the Society's younger members – along with spending money for the fortunate winners. There will be three student awards at \$300 each, selected from the poster competition – along with one New Investigator's award of \$300, selected from the submitted abstracts. The competition is part of an expanding range of activities and opportunities for student members and for the New Researchers Network.

4th UK and Ireland one-day meeting on Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology

This year's meeting will be held at the St. Alban's Centre, High Holborn, London, on Monday July 7. Expressions of interest in attending or submitting an abstract for this meeting should be sent to Liz Kelly at University of Central Lancashire (EJKelly@uclan.ac.uk).

International EcoHealth Forum (IEF) 2008, Merida, Mexico

From December 1-5, researchers, practitioners, educators and policy-makers from around the world will gather in Merida, Merida Yucatan, Mexico, for the International EcoHealth Forum 2008, entitled *EcoHealth: Healthy Environments, Healthy People*. The International EcoHealth Forum website is now live at www.ecohealth2008.org.

The National Institute of Public Health of Mexico will host the Forum, in collaboration with the International Development Research Centre (Canada), the International Association for Ecology and Health (IAEH), the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Brazil), and the Institute of Ecological Research, Brazil. The Forum is also the Second Biennial Conference of IAEH.

The newly-launched *Global Environmental Change and Human Health* project, part of the large International Council for Science (ICSU) family, will also be much engaged in this forum. That project seeks participation by environmental health researchers, especially from developing countries. Regional case studies and research network formation are planned. There is need for collaborative research to understand how large-scale changes in environments and ecosystems affect health. See www.essp.org (links: projects/health).

President's diary

I took the opportunity recently, while traveling to India and South Korea, to have discussions with ISEE members and to participate in the Second East Asian ISEE Conference (and regional ISEE East Asian Chapter meeting) in Jeju, Korea, April 18-19.

I also attended the annual World Health Assembly at WHO, Geneva, during May 19-24. ISEE is an affiliated Non-Government Organization with WHO, and has observer status at the WHA meeting. During that visit I met with our WHO contact officer to agree on the Society's work-plan for ISEE/WHO collaboration during 2009-2011. I also met with the secretariat for the next revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), to assess whether and how ISEE can contribute to that revision over the 2008-2009 period (especially in relation to any particular

health-outcome reclassification needs in relation to environmental health research and policy making). The ISEE Council will discuss how to respond to this invitation – meanwhile, suggestions from members are welcome.

The World Health Day theme *Protecting Health Against Climate Change* resurfaced as a formal resolution, much discussed and unanimously supported, at the World Health Assembly. (For details, see Commentary by myself et al in *The Lancet* of June 7.) This major facet of global environmental health is now looming increasingly large on both the WHO and the wider UN agenda. This process should yield a wider and more sophisticated awareness of the fundamental importance of environmental conditions to human wellbeing, health and survival.

Which takes us back to the opening section of this newsletter...

Tony McMichael
ISEE President