

Press Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Breastcancer: What's preventing prevention?

Utrecht, the Netherlands, 24th of January 2008.

Tens of thousands of cases of breast cancer could be prevented in the EU if the cancer establishment recognized environmental and occupational risk factors as a contributory factor in the rising breast cancer epidemic according to a briefing published in January 2008. The briefing "Politics and Prevention: linking breast cancer and the environment" from Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) highlights this neglect of the risk factors.

The missing risk factors

"Why is prevention off the agenda?" asks Helen Lynn/Sascha Gabizon. "Conventionally accepted risk factors only account for 50-70 % of breast cancer cases leaving 30-50 % with no known cause. We believe exposure to toxic chemicals is the missing risk factor for breast cancer. We would like to know why our government and the cancer establishment is ignoring this risk factor? Mounting evidence points to exposure to environmental contaminants and toxic chemicals as a major contributor in the rising cases of breast cancer.

WECF, as the women's organization working on health and the environment, calls on the EU for a strategy on the primary prevention of breast cancer and the recognition of and strategies to address the missing environmental and occupational risk factors.

The current epidemic is depleting health budgets all over the EU and is unsustainable. Treatment is costly and the cost to society in lost lives is immeasurable. Survival rates continue to fall despite increased spending. Every 6 minutes a woman dies from breast cancer in the EU.

Preventable?

Screening is not the answer to this growing epidemic. Detection is costly and for every 500 women screened, only one life will be saved and 499 women will be exposed to a dose of radiation which could increase the risk of them getting the disease. Breast cancer can be likened to an unexpected journey, one for which there are few guidebooks and the terrain is unchartered, but what if that journey was preventable?

Mounting evidence points to exposure to environmental contaminants and toxic chemicals as a major concern in relation to rising cases of breast cancer.

Politics and Prevention: Linking breast cancer and our environment.

A report by WECF.

Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) is a network of 80 organisations in Western and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, working on sustainable development, health and environment, and poverty reduction.

A copy of the report is available from WECF.

The report is also downloadable as a PDF-document from the WECF website: www.wecf.eu

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Notes to the editor:

1. WECF is a network of women's and environmental organisations in 37 countries and advocates a healthy environment for all. It campaigns for safe chemicals, water and sanitation, energy, and food production for all.
2. The missing risk factors are: exposure to endocrine disrupting substances and carcinogens; lifetime exposure to synthetic and natural oestrogen's, trauma to breast; exposure to light at night; stress; and occupational exposures and shift work.
3. Environmental pollution has a variety of effects on human health. Illnesses such as allergies, asthma, cancers, neuro-developmental disorders, and even cardiovascular disease have been linked to environmental factors such as exposure to environmental pollutants. These diseases are on the rise and so are the costs for treatment and the impact on labour productivity. Assessing the full extent of the environmental burden of disease (EBD), or the impact of the environment on health, can help in understanding the actual causes of illnesses and provides opportunities for relevant policy interventions.

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