

Press Release No. 47/2010

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Federal Environment Minister Röttgen and Environment Agency President Flasbarth: Data on human exposure to pollutants urgently needed

Human Biomonitoring is an important instrument of health related environmental protection

Human biomonitoring (HBM) activities of the Federal Environment Ministry provide important data on chemical exposure of the public. At a conference of experts which took place in Berlin from 26 to 28 September, Federal Environment Minister Norbert Röttgen noted: "Human biomonitoring is an excellent early warning system to detect pollutants harmful to the public at an early stage. It gives us the opportunity to monitor the successes of our chemicals policy and to determine those areas where action is most needed." President of the Federal Environment Agency Jochen Flasbarth stressed: "We need a strengthening of international cooperation in the field of biomonitoring to systematically prevent with precautionary measures an exposure of public health to environmental chemicals. Today numerous chemicals are used on a global scale; therefore it is important to prevent exposure at the very source by refusing to approve the use of problematic substances in products."

Dr Röttgen went on to say: "The exposure to chemicals such as lead cadmium, DDT and dioxins has considerably dropped in Germany. However, we are concerned about the elevated exposure of children to certain plasticisers extensively used in plastic manufacturing."

HBM surveys investigate public exposure to chemicals and other harmful environmental impacts detrimental to public health. For health related environmental protection HBM is a key information and monitoring instrument. It provides environmental policy with scientific data on which substances are absorbed by the human body and at what levels, whether there are certain population groups which are particularly affected and whether chemical policy regulations have led to the desired decrease in exposure.

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The two day conference jointly organised by the Federal Environment Ministry (BMU) and the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) under the topic "Human Biomonitoring - Political Benefits, Scientific Challenges" in which experts from 36 countries participated

- looked into the potential and limits of HBM in the registration and assessment of public exposures,
- took a critical look at which substances should be examined as a matter of priority and what health impacts are to be expected from chemical exposure and
- discussed the incorporation of HBM into national and international initiatives on environmental health.

Experts discussed both the experience gained from long-standing HBM programmes and the purport and objective of new or emerging international HBM projects in six sessions. Two sessions looked into the assessment of data procured through HBM as an aid to identifying potential health risks and determine the need for action to reduce exposure. Two panel discussions took place on the more general political aspects of HBM.

Dessau-Roßlau, 27 September 2010