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Environmental justice – Environmental and health protection for everyone!

Lower income population often bears the brunt of environmental problems

The poor often live in an environment which can cause illness, according to epidemiological studies done related to social and environmental factors. Their results show that the lower income populations in Germany are more prone to live in streets where there is heavier through traffic and where they are more exposed to noise and exhaust gases than people who are better off financially. Respiratory diseases, cardiovascular and sleep disorders are some of the possible consequences. "Socio-economic background is a determining factor in Germany as to how or whether children, adolescents and adults suffer the effects of noise or pollution. Education and income affect living conditions, lifestyle, and thus the health risks posed to humans. The financially deprived are very often more affected by environmental problems, and this must change", said Vice President Dr. Thomas Holzmann of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA), upon the publication of the latest edition of the Environment and Health Information Service (UMID). The latest edition focuses on the subject of environmental justice with a view to environmental health and social status.

UBA already published the results of its German Environmental Survey 2003/06 (GerES IV) for Children (*German: KUS*) last year and pointed out the socio-economic imbalance in the distribution of environmental problems in Germany. Children aged 3-14 from lower income families are often more exposed to tobacco smoke and lead. Children from more privileged backgrounds on the other hand bear the brunt of problems related to organochlorine compounds such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) and dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene (DDE). The results of *KUS* were the first representative data about the environmental exposure of children in Germany.

The current edition of UMID is devoted to environmental justice, environmental health, and social status as a relatively new field of research in Germany. The (uneven) distribution of environmental problems and its impact on health in various socio-economic segments of the population has been rather ignored to date. Up to now there have been very few systematic investigations of the effects of environment on health and quality of life among the different

socio-economic segments of the population. The latest edition of UMID reviews a selection of research projects and activities at federal, state, and municipal levels that take account of social factors and environment-related health risks in their analysis. The articles cover the following range of subjects:

Contamination with pollutants and socio-economic status - selected results from UBA's German Environmental Surveys (GerESs)

Environmental justice as a new topic at the interface of environment, health, social affairs and urban development in Berlin

Social differences in coping with environmental pollution in Kassel

Environmental justice as a focal point of health reporting in Bavaria

UMID is published three to four times annually and provides free information on the environment, health, and consumer protection. In addition to the Federal Ministry for Health (*BMG*) and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (*BMU*) as organs responsible for the Action Programme Environment and Health, other contributor institutions to UMID are the Federal Environment Agency, the Federal Office for Radiation Protection, Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, and the Robert Koch Institute. UMID readership primarily includes those who work in public health offices and public administrations, as well as physicians, non-governmental organisations, and other interested parties.

The latest edition of UMID (*Umweltgerechtigkeit - Umwelt, Gesundheit und soziale Lage 2/2008*) is here: <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/umid>. A print version of UMID can be ordered by sending an email to info@umweltbundesamt.de or by phoning 0340 2103-2130.

Further information on the Action Programme "Environment and Health" (APUG) is available at www.apug.de.

For a summary of the Environmental Survey for Children (in German), see <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-presse/hintergrund/kus-jb2006.pdf>.

Dessau-Roßlau, 1 August 2008