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NEWSFLASH

Sharing initiatives to help tackle Environment and Health challenges in Europe

April 2025

CONTENTS

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EDITORIAL

The ERA-ENVHEALTH network is pleased to share its new Newsflash. We are looking forward to sharing information on our activities, events, research projects and opportunities in the environment and health area. We hope in this way to contribute to their visibility and to stimulate exchange and collaboration among different actors involved in environment and health and enhance networking opportunities.

Visit the network's webpage

Health
Food Chain Safety
Environment

Go to FPS website

Get to know us

Belgium National Action Plan for Environment and Health - NEHAP

The Belgian NEHAP is a collaborative effort involving the Belgian federal state, communities, and regions, focusing on environmental and health policies. The third edition, NEHAP3, spans from 2023 to 2029 and prioritises two key themes: climate change and chemicals. The climate change theme emphasises resilience, adaptation, and mitigation, while the chemicals theme aims to reduce their harmful impacts on human health and the environment.

NEHAP3 encompasses eight action areas, all centered around the interplay between environment and health. The Belgian administrations for environment and health are responsible for implementing NEHAP3, reporting to their respective ministers. Administrative support is provided by a permanent NEHAP secretariat.

Yvette Meganck - NEHAP secretariat, GICLG secretariat

Yvette Meganck is part of the NEHAP secretariat, which operates under the Belgian Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety, and Environment. She and her colleagues support various working groups focused on monitoring exotic mosquitoes, ticks, implementing the national heat and ozone plan, and developing resilient and low-carbon health care systems. They also work on the national action plan for endocrine disruptors, training health care professionals on the environmental impacts on health, and PARC, the Partnership for the Assessment of Risks from Chemicals.

Go to the NEHAP website (in Dutch or French only)

Highlight of the month

Save the date for the next ERA-ENVHEALTH 2025 Open Conference - Environment and Health Controversies October 15, 2025, 9:15-14:00 CET

Hosted by the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), the Netherlands

Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu
Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport

Register here by September 23 for in person or online participation

Environment and Health Controversies: Science, Society, and Policy in Dialogue

Controversies and debates over environment and health issues have always existed at all times and everywhere. Think, for example, of glyphosate, Bisphenol-A, rubber granules, wind turbines, electromagnetic fields or Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances - PFAS. Society, science and policy then seem to confront each other based on different angles and claims about possible impacts on health and the environment of the investigated issue, technologies or substances (be they newly detected or emerging).

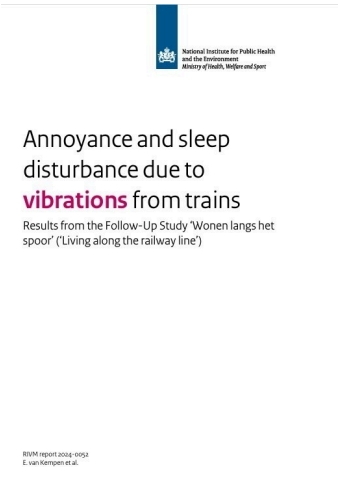
Our 'open conference' seeks to analyse these controversies and address the practical ways through which risk assessors and managers, and especially the research institutes, handle these differing angles and claims about adverse effects of technologies/substances.

Through a series of examples of environment and health issues from various European countries that have generated controversy, we want to explore this question. The environment and health aspects of each case will be discussed, while paying particular attention to the social-scientific interpretation of the debate: examining their origin/drivers (how did it come about), the management

strategy (how was it handled), communication approaches (what communication strategies were applied), successes (what worked), challenges (what did not work), and lessons learnt (what did we learn, what is the feedback and is there any good practice advice)?

Current initiatives

Annoyance and disturbance cases from the Netherlands and Germany

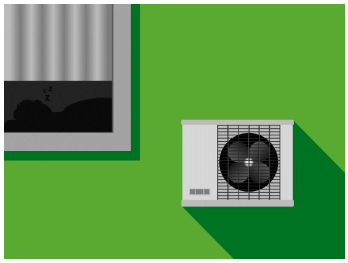


RIVM recommends that in future, policy regarding vibrations caused by trains, social and personal factors be taken into account. While there are several laws that regulate noise from trains, there are few, if any, when it comes to vibrations from trains. The outcomes of this study may serve as input for legislation in this area.

See the report

Annoyance and sleep disturbance due to vibrations from trains - Results from the Follow-Up Survey Wonen langs het spoor ('Living along the railway line')

In 2021, around 11% of people in the Netherlands aged 16 and over who lived within 300 metres of a railway line experienced high annoyance due to vibrations from railway traffic. This amounts to an estimated 126,500 people. Furthermore, 13% experienced high sleep disturbance due to such vibrations. The annoyance and sleep disturbance were mainly due to vibrations from passing freight trains. Areas in the vicinity of tunnels, railway bridges and parallel tracks were excluded from this estimation. The above describes the outcomes of a survey among more than 5,600 people. The survey area has a total population of over 1.1 million, who live in approximately 533,000 houses. In addition, people who are exposed to higher levels of vibrations or live closer to a railway line are more likely to report high annoyance due to vibrations from freight trains. The association between vibration levels, distance and annoyance is much less pronounced for passenger trains. In addition to the vibrations, there are social and personal factors that affect the extent to which people experience annoyance or sleep disturbance. An important factor is concern about property devaluation or property damage. Other factors that influence peoples' experience include hearing, feeling or seeing windows, doors or crockery ('rattle'). The extent to which people accept that trains cause vibrations and the expectations that they have about future vibration levels also play a role.



The report urges the need for field research to better understand the effects of air-source heat pump noise in real-life settings as well as for research for developing solutions to ensure the compatibility of sustainable energy systems with healthy neighbourhood conditions.

See the report

Annoyance and sleep disturbance due to noise from air-source heat pumps and air conditioners

Air-source heat pumps are increasingly being installed in residential areas due to energy transition efforts, resulting in changes in noise exposure in former quiet neighbourhoods. The report Annoyance and sleep disturbance due to noise from air-source heat pumps and air conditioners presents the results of a research project that investigated the influence of noise from air-source heat pumps and air conditioners on sleep quality, daytime functioning and mood in two laboratory studies. It was found that typical noises from air-source heat pumps and air conditioners can affect sleep, concentration and mood. These research findings indicate that the sounds of air-source heat pumps and air conditioners could be perceived as noise.
The report highlights the need to address the growing presence of air-source heat pumps in residential areas and their associated noise issues.

On the basis of these results a concept was developed, which informs the public appropriately about infrasound and its effects, partly using the example of wind turbines.

See the report

Informational concept on infrasound and its effects

The public often discusses infrasound as a threat to human health. The research project Informational concept on infrasound and its effects analysed people's knowledge and emotions about infrasound and its effect. A communication concept for different target groups, based on the scientific knowledge on risk communication, was developed with the aim of providing appropriate information about infrasound and its possible health effects. More detailed, the objective of this project was to deepen the concepts and connections regarding the perceived risk of infrasound, the underlying information processing processes and the acceptance of wind turbines based on a review of the state of research (literature analyses) as well as to investigate those concepts and connections by means of empirical surveys. In this context, the research was guided by questions about the understanding of infrasound and the emotions associated with it, as well as the mechanisms that lead to such emotions. Based on these findings, the transferability of the understanding of and emotions about infrasound and its effects on the acceptance of wind turbines was investigated. Furthermore, on the basis of these results a concept was developed, which informs the public appropriately about infrasound and its effects, partly using the example of wind turbines.

Current initiatives

Operation Zero: Tackling Emissions in Belgium's Healthcare Sector

For more information:

Greenhouse gas emissions of the Belgian Healthcare

The impact of climate change is everywhere. We feel the consequences of climate change on our health through an increase in hot days, flooding, accelerated transmission of zoonoses and much more.
The healthcare sector may on the one hand be feeling the impact of global warming, it can on the other hand also do its part by reducing its own emissions. A recent study called 'Operation Zero', commissioned by Belgian federal, regional, and community administrations, provides insight into the emissions of the healthcare sector and predicts how these emissions will evolve. The Belgian health care sector (including hospitals, residential care centres, preventive medicine, ambulatory care, etc.) is responsible for 5% of Belgian emissions. This is comparable to the global trend, and Belgium does not differ much from its neighbouring countries in this

system (Excel with overview of results)

Belgian roadmap for health care decarbonization (Excel with tabular results of the roadmap)

Technical annex – methodology, assumptions and limitations of these reports

Implementation framework

Thanks to ‘Operation Zero’, we have a better overview of how emissions are distributed across the Belgian healthcare sector. This will help us as a government to take measures to reduce emissions, but also to encourage healthcare institutions to put sustainability at the centre of their healthcare policy.

respect. It is also predicted that these emissions will increase considerably by another 61% by 2050. This is due to the expected increased ‘consumption’ of healthcare, caused by several factors, amongst which an ageing population is the most important.

The study also provides insights into the distribution of emissions across healthcare institutions and other sources. Among various healthcare institutions, hospitals contribute the most to emissions at 55%, while residential care centres contribute only 8%. The distribution of emission sources is also remarkable: energy and heat consumption account for 14%, while transport contributes only 1%. In contrast, goods and services account for more than 80%. This includes medical equipment, food, office supplies, and medication. The consumption of pharmaceuticals accounts for a significant proportion (30%) of total emissions. Typical examples of pharmaceutical emissions are anaesthetic gases and aerosol puffers, both of which emit greenhouse gases. There are also major differences in how sustainably medication is produced. Many hospitals and other healthcare institutions have been actively working for years to integrate sustainability into their organisation and to limit their emissions as much as possible. Sustainability initiatives are popping up more and more, ranging from renewable energy and sustainable and well-thought-out construction to sustainable waste processing and locally provided catering, and so much more. Belgian public services are also involved in international collaborations to share best practices and learn how other countries are tackling these issues.

At the 2021 climate summit, Belgium committed to making the healthcare sector climate neutral by 2050.

Save the date

SETAC®

ISBM 13 Milan 2025

13th International Symposium on Biological monitoring in occupational and environmental health Milan, Italy

ISES ’25 ATLANTA ISEE GEORGIA, US AUGUST 17-20

Joint Annual Meeting of the International Society of Exposure Science and the International Society for

35th Annual Meeting of the SETAC - “Innovation for Tomorrow: Progress in Safe and Sustainable Concepts"
Vienna, Austria
May 11-15, 2025

More information

September 9-12, 2025

More information

Environmental Epidemiology 2025
Atlanta, Georgia, USA
August 17-20, 2025

More information

New opportunities

21st RECETOX Summer School and PARC Training 2025

11 – 13 June 2025

Brno, Czech Republic
Masaryk University
RECETOX

More information & registration

RECETOX Summer School 2025: Advancing Chemical Safety Assessment

We are pleased to announce the RECETOX Summer School 2025, which will take place from **June 9-13, 2025** (Monday noon to Friday noon). This year's program features two specialized classes addressing critical aspects of chemical safety assessment.

Two Independent Modules

While conceptually connected, both classes are designed as standalone modules. Participants may register for either one or both classes depending on their interests and professional needs.

Class A: Environmental and Health Risk Assessment of Chemicals in the EU

This introductory class covers the principles and regulatory practices of chemical risk assessment in the European Union.

Class B: NAMs Implementation in Chemical Hazard Assessment

Organized within the framework of the EU PARC partnership, this specialized training focuses on New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) in chemical hazard assessment.

Join us

What?

ERA-ENVHEALTH is an active transnational network which includes stakeholders in the Environment and Health field, stemming from a previous European-funded project which ended in 2012. It is a forum to discuss challenges, visions and emerging issues.

CONTACTS

Do not hesitate to get in touch with the network either through your national contact point and

Why?

The main purposes for the network are to share and exchange information and promote networking and joint activities (such as the annual open conference on specific topics of interest and newsflash).

Subscribe to the Newsflash

The network is based on "contributing and sharing"; each organisation participates on a voluntary basis.

member of the network or by contacting:

Adrienne Pittman
ANSES
European & International Affairs Department

Contact Adrienne

	Acronym	Name	Country
anses	**ANSES**	French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety	France
	CNR	Italian National Research Council	Italy
epa	**EPA**	Environmental Protection Agency	Ireland
	FPS HFCSE	Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment	Belgium
Instituto Nacional de Saúde	**INSA**	National Institute of Health Dr Ricardo Jorge	Portugal
	PHAS	Public Health Agency of Sweden	Sweden
	RIVM	National Institute for Public Health and the Environment	Netherlands
	Swedish EPA	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency	Sweden
MUNI | RECETOX	**RECETOX**	National Centre for Toxic Compounds in the Environment, Faculty of Science, Masaryk University	Czech Republic
universidade de aveiro	**UA**	University of Aveiro	Portugal
Umwelt Bundesamt	**UBA**	German Environment Agency	Germany
	UoWM	University of Western Macedonia	Greece

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