

Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) of North America

Expert Advisory Board on Children's Health and the Environment Session 01-01

26 November 2001, 17:00-19:00

CEC Offices

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Summary Record

Council Resolution 00-10 called for the formation of an Expert Advisory Board to advise Council on matters pertaining to children's health and the environment in North America. Council Resolution 01-04, adopted in June 2001, established the terms of reference for the Board. In October 2001, the nine-person Board, comprised of three experts nominated by each of the Parties, was officially formed. The Board held its first meeting on 26 November 2001 in Montreal, Quebec, at the offices of the CEC.

This summary record reports on the discussions held and decisions made during that meeting. Please see Annex A for the agenda and Annex B for the list of participants. The full list of Expert Advisory Board Members appears in Annex C. Council Resolutions 00-10 and 01-04 are attached as Annexes C and D, respectively.

Summary records and other documents pertaining to the Expert Advisory Board can be obtained upon request from the CEC secretariat or on the CEC website at <www.cec.org>.

Opening Remarks and Introduction

Janine Ferretti, CEC Executive Director, welcomed the Board members and congratulated and thanked them for their involvement. She emphasized the key role that the Board will have in advising the Council and guiding the CEC's work on children's health and the environment. She noted how quickly the issue of children's environmental health had become a priority issue for the CEC, and recounted some of the highlights to date, including the symposium (Toronto, May 2000), Council Resolution 00-10 (June 2000), and the successful national workshop held in Mexico in June 2001. She stressed the increasing focus on and importance of recognizing the interconnections between health, environment and development issues.

Greg Block, who facilitated the session, then invited participants to introduce themselves. Following the introductions, Mr. Block gave a brief overview of the CEC and highlighted some of the roles the organization can play in catalyzing action, promoting synergies among the three countries and engaging the public. He noted the upcoming Council meeting in June 2002, the discussed the role of the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC).

Overview of the CEC's Children's Health and the Environment Project

Erica Phipps, program manager for the CEC's children's environmental health project, provided an overview of the initiative to date. She also explained the role of the trilateral CEH Team, comprised of environment and health officials from the three governments, which is actively engaged in guiding and implementing the project. Project activities undertaken to date include an inventory of national, bilateral and trilateral activities related to children's environmental health,

an exploratory meeting on indicators, and the upcoming Trilateral Workshop which will provide the groundwork for the development of a trilateral, multi-year Cooperative Agenda. Ms. Phipps also noted emerging linkages with the Sound Management of Chemicals (SMOC), the pollutant release and transfer register (PRTR) project, and the air quality program.

Overview of Terms of Reference and Operating Procedures

Ms. Phipps then outlined the role of the Expert Advisory Board, as specified in the terms of reference, which is to:

- develop options and recommendations and provide advice to the Council on children's environmental health issues, including priority areas for the CEC work program; and
- participate in relevant CEC events.

Board members are expected to carry out their responsibilities in their capacity as individual experts, and not behalf of their organizations or governments. A chair is to be selected by the members of the Board for the entire 2-year period or upon a rotating basis. The Board will seek consensus on its recommendations, but if not achieved, differences of opinion will be noted. All documents and other outputs of the Board will be made publicly available.

Ms. Phipps mentioned several upcoming opportunities for Expert Advisory Board involvement, including participation in the upcoming Trilateral Workshop (27-28 November 2001), providing guidance on the development of the Cooperative Agenda, facilitating public input into that process, and a proposed joint meeting with JPAC in early March 2002 in Mexico.

Discussion on Role and Objectives of the Expert Advisory Board

The Board then had an open discussion on their role and objectives. One member noted that while there are numerous areas where more research is needed, there are other cases where enough is known to justify making changes, e.g. stopping the export of substances that are no longer allowed domestically.

Another Board member explained that Mexico is just starting to build a national strategy for children's environmental health. It was suggested that the three countries can advance jointly through the development of common targets and objectives, but that the national components would need to take into account the situation in each country.

Another member stated the importance of being able to account for achievements at the end of their 2-year tenure. It was suggested that specific questions or tasks posed by the Council to the Board would help them to effectively focus their work.

Another member of the Board indicated that they would be most able to contribute to the work of the Board by helping to identify areas where additional research is needed, given that individual's particular work and experience.

Another member noted that there are numerous groups that are interested in children's health that don't necessarily have an environmental perspective, and that activities are underway at all levels, for example at the state and local levels, in schools, etc.

Another Board member noted the trends in conditions affecting children, e.g. asthma, neuro-developmental disorders, certain congenital abnormalities and certain cancers. This member proposed that there should be goals set for reducing childhood morbidity related to these

conditions. It was suggested that the Board should look at the broad range of issues affecting children's environmental health, identify specific areas of focus, set an agenda of what needs to be done, and then draw upon communities, toxicologists, health professionals and other stakeholders to make it happen. It was further noted that decision-making occurs at all levels, including at the individual level, and stressed the need for protective and preventive policies.

There was some discussion on the scope of the Board's mandate, e.g., whether they are limited to addressing the priority issues identified by Council or whether they could look at other issues. The secretariat and members of the CEH Team clarified that the Board can advise Council on any matters pertaining to children's environmental health. It was emphasized that the CEC's initiative should not be just a paper exercise, that there is a need for action plans to work toward more protective policies that outline specific actions to be taken by each country. A governmental representative mentioned the June 2002 meeting of Council as an important target date and opportunity. Another governmental representative noted that the Board is well-positioned to advise the governments on what actions are needed to ensure better protection of children from environmental threats to their health.

Selection of Chair

It was agreed that the selection of a chair would be addressed the following day. During a follow-up lunchtime discussion on 27 November, the Board unanimously agreed that Dr. Irena Buka would assume the role of chair, and that the issue of whether to have a rotating chair would be revisited in approximately 8 months. The Board also agreed that while the chairperson would have overall responsibility for guiding and facilitating the work of the Board, that other Board members may take on lead roles for certain issues for which they have a particular interest or expertise.