



## Briefing Notes Regional Forum on Environment and Health In Southeast and East Asian countries

### Regional Effort Toward Better Environment and Health

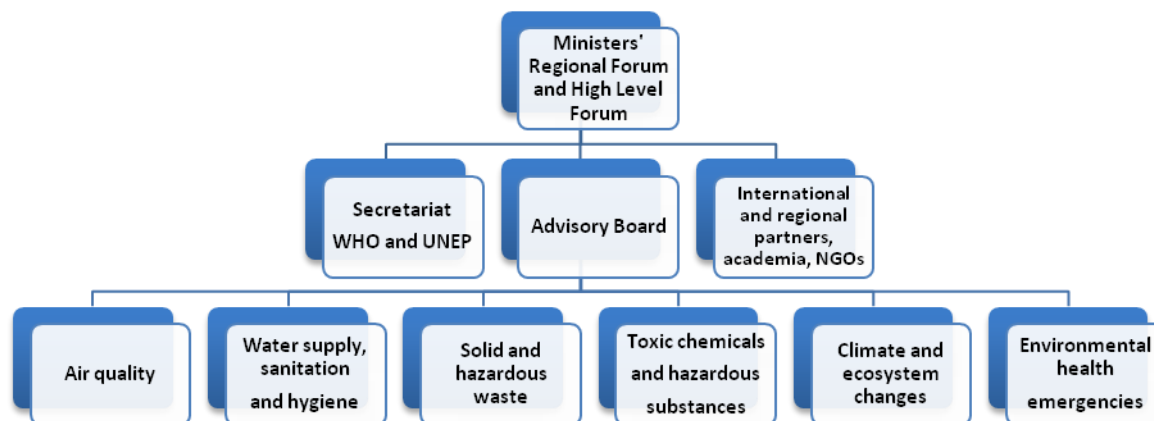
Every year, an estimated 6.6 million deaths in Asia are attributable to various environmental health risks, amounting to one quarter of the total number of deaths in the region. Despite the magnitude of this health problem, the capacities of countries to deal with environmental health problems are limited and require strengthening.

The regional forum to address environmental health problems began in 2004, through a High-Level meeting in Manila in November 2004, involving Director and Director General level officials of the Southeast and East Asian countries. The meeting recommended that a Ministerial Regional Forum be convened.

### The Regional Forum

The general objective of this Regional Forum is to effectively deal with the environmental health problems within countries and among themselves by increasing the capacity of Southeast and East Asian countries on environmental health management.

It aims to strengthen the cooperation of the ministries responsible for environment and health within the countries and across the region by providing a mechanism for sharing knowledge and experiences, improving policy and regulatory frameworks at the national and regional level, and promoting the implementation of integrated environmental health strategies and regulations.



- [The Charter for the Regional Forum](#)
- [The Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Health \(Bangkok Declaration\)](#)

The First Ministerial Regional Forum on Environment and Health was held from 8 - 9 August 2007 in Bangkok, Thailand. The Charter for the Regional Forum and its

implementation workplans were adopted to coordinate action among related agencies. Also adopted was the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Health, referred as Bangkok Declaration, to provide a venue for knowledge and to improve policy framework at national and regional levels.

### **Priorities for 2007–2010**

Governments should address the health impacts and implications of the following priority areas of environmental concern at the local, national, regional and global levels:

- Air quality
- Water supply, hygiene and sanitation
- Solid and hazardous waste
- Toxic chemicals and hazardous substances
- Climate change, ozone depletion and ecosystem changes
- Contingency planning, preparedness and response in environmental health emergencies

A Thematic Working Group has been formed for each of the priority area.

In addressing these priorities, countries can be guided by the following criteria:

1. areas where environmental conditions create or tend to create the greatest burden on disease and mortality;
2. emerging significant risks where impact information may not yet be fully available;
3. vulnerable population groups; and
4. environmental management systems under the threat of deterioration due to aging and environmental degradation.

The importance of multisectoral planning and community mobilization should be kept in mind. The adoption of healthy lifestyles and other preventive measures should be underscored. The need for joint efforts and regional and international cooperation should be acknowledged. Capacity building, information dissemination, education, training and further studies should be promoted.

The priorities will be reviewed by the Second Ministerial Regional Forum in July 2010.

### **National Action Plans**

The Regional Forum aims to assist countries to assess priority environmental health risks, develop and implement cost-effective National Environmental Health Action Plans (NEHAP) and equivalent plans and disseminate the same to the various stakeholders.

### **Ministerial Forum**

The Ministers of the Environment and Health agencies of the member countries will meet in a Regional Forum every 3 years. The Forum shall provide overall guidance for strategic directions and supervision of the initiative.

The Ministerial Regional Forum on Environment and Health is jointly organized by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organization (WHO). The First Ministerial Regional Forum was hosted by the Government of Thailand and the Chulabhorn Research Institute. Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol of Thailand inaugurated the meeting. The Second Ministerial Regional Forum will be held in July 2010, hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea.

### **High-Level Officials' Meeting**

#### **2004**

##### **First High-Level Officials' Meeting**

The first High-Level Officials' meeting was convened in Manila in November 2004, involving Director and Director General level officials of the Southeast and East Asian countries. The meeting recommended that a Ministerial Regional Forum be convened.

#### **2005**

##### **Second High-Level Officials' Meeting**

The second High-Level meeting was conducted in December 2005 in Bangkok, to discuss the draft Charter of the Regional Forum. It was also decided to convene the first ministerial Regional Forum on Environment and Health towards the end of 2006, where the charter of the Regional Forum would be endorsed, and to agree on work plans.

#### **2007**

##### **Third High-Level Officials' Meeting**

High-Level Officials from 14 participating countries attended the meeting on August 2007. The meeting updated the regional and national activities since the second High-Level Official's Meeting, finalized the Thematic Working Group Workplans and discussed the Bangkok Declaration.

#### **2009**

##### **Fourth High-Level Officials' Meeting**

The 4th High-Level meeting on Environment and Health reviewed progress in the development and implementation of the regional charter and updates of the National Environmental Health Action Plans (NEHAP) and equivalent plans as well as the workplans of the six Thematic Working Groups. This meeting was held on March 2009 in Beijing, China.

High-Level Officials' meeting is scheduled every 18 months to discuss issues related to the Regional Forum.

### **Scientific Conferences**

Three Scientific Conferences for the Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asia were convened in Bangkok, Thailand in 2005, in Seoul, Republic of Korea in 2007 and in

Jeju, Republic of Korea in 2008. The conferences identified and discussed significant and emerging environmental health issues among the experts worldwide.

### **The Advisory Board**

The Advisory Board is composed of the Chairs of Thematic Working Groups(TWG) and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Regional Ministerial Forum. The Advisory Board will meet regularly to review independently scientific information and ensure better coordination among the TWGs in addressing the priorities identified by the Regional Forum and to cooperate with the Secretariat in fulfilling its responsibilities in preparing for the Ministerial Regional Forum.

### **National Communication Focal Points**

Each of the 14 participating countries designates a national communication focal point, one from the Ministry of Health and another one from the Ministry of Environment. The list is updated regularly by the Secretariat in coordination with the respective member countries.

### **Secretariat**

WHO and UNEP serve as the joint Secretariat to support the operations of the Regional Forum and the Thematic Working Groups. The Secretariat provides day-to-day management of this Regional Forum and assists member countries in

- (a) Collecting and disseminating information on significant and innovative initiatives related to environmental health management worldwide;
- (b) Maintaining an overview and monitoring the implementation of national environmental health action plans or equivalent plans and implementation of such Action Plans;
- (c) Providing technical and administrative support to members who are organizing events that take place under the umbrella of the Regional Forum; and
- (d) Assisting in resource mobilization for implementing and expanding activities of its member countries.

A website is being maintained and updated regularly for the regional forum:

<http://www.environment-health.asia/>

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