

WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network Newsletter

Newsletter No. 14: Summer 2019

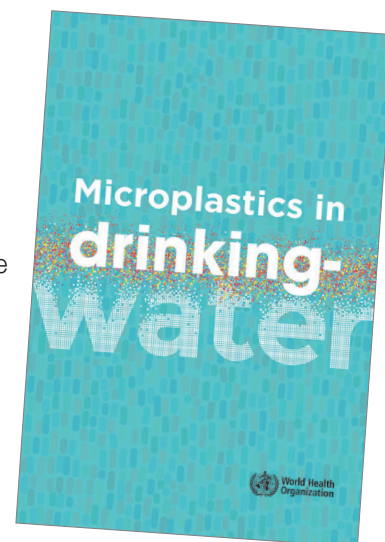
New Network Participants

- Chemicals Branch, Pharmacy Department, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Division of Environmental Health, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Latest Publications

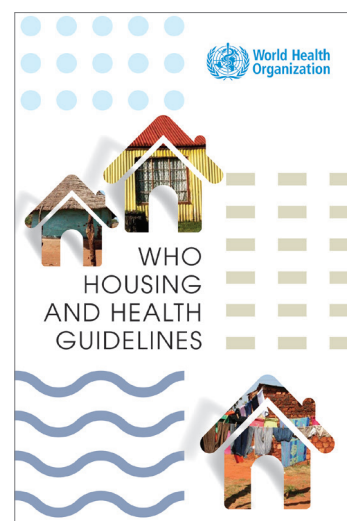
Microplastics in drinking-water

WHO has published a report on the potential human health risks associated with exposure to microplastics through drinking-water. The report summarizes the evidence on occurrence of microplastics in drinking-water and the evidence for health risks from these particles and chemicals (unbound monomers, additives and sorbed chemicals from the environment). As well as summarizing the key findings, the report also makes recommendations and identifies knowledge gaps and research needs. The report concludes that, though the evidence is limited, chemicals associated with microplastics pose a low concern for human health. This conclusion was based on assessments which compared the available toxicity data with estimated intakes from very conservative exposure scenarios and identified adequately protective margins of exposure. WHO will be undertaking a further assessment of the risks to human health from microplastics in the environment from all routes of exposure, including through food and air. http://who.int/entity/water_sanitation_health/publications/microplastics-in-drinking-water/en/index.html



WHO Housing and Health Guidelines

WHO has published a guideline aimed at providing practical recommendations to reduce the health burden due to unsafe and substandard housing. The publication includes a section summarizing existing WHO guidance on key housing risk factors, including risks from chemicals. These relate to asbestos, lead, radon gas, chemical contaminants in drinking-water and chemicals from furnishings and building materials which contribute to poor indoor air quality. WHO guideline values exist for selected chemical contaminants in drinking-water and in indoor air. <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/publications/housing-health-guidelines/en/>



Latest IARC Monographs

The IARC Monographs identify environmental factors that can increase the risk of cancer. The Monograph evaluating the carcinogenicity of pentachlorophenol and some related compounds has been published as IARC Monograph Volume 117. These compounds were used as wood preservatives or insecticides before being banned or severely restricted as persistent organic pollutants. Pentachlorophenol (also known as PCP) was evaluated as “carcinogenic to humans” (Group 1), while the other chemicals in this Monograph were evaluated as “probably carcinogenic to humans” (Group 2A) or “possibly carcinogenic to humans” (Group 2B).

The Monograph evaluating a series of chemicals which cause tumours of the urinary tract in rodents was published as IARC Monograph Volume 119. All of the chemicals evaluated, including melamine and a number of chemicals used as solvents, intermediates in manufacturing of chemicals or other industrial applications, were classified as “possibly carcinogenic to humans” (Group 2B), based on sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals and no data or inadequate evidence in humans.

All publications from the IARC Monographs Programme can be accessed at <http://monographs.iarc.fr>.

Healthy Environments Publication

WHO has published a new concise guide summarizing key actions for policy-makers to create healthier environments for healthier populations (including chemical safety). Each year, an estimated 12.6 million deaths are attributable to unhealthy environments (1.6 million deaths due to chemicals), as a result of living or working in an unhealthy environment – this is nearly one in four of total global deaths. The guide cuts across environmental health areas, and points to action by relevant sectors. Furthermore, the guide highlights key facts on health impacts from environmental risks for increased awareness, and the support offered by WHO on this agenda. This guide provides an overview of key actions and points, as well as more detailed information and guidance on how to take further steps, which includes infographics by topic.

<https://www.who.int/phe/publications/healthy-environments/>
<https://www.who.int/phe/infographics/healthy-environments/en/>



Updates

Network Meeting

The 3rd face to face meeting of the Network will take place during the week of 8-12 June 2020. The meeting will be hosted by the WHO Collaborating Centre at the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), using the conference facilities of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, USA (close to Washington DC). The contact point of each institution in the Network will receive details of the arrangements for the meeting by email.

New organizing committee convened

In order to facilitate the organization of the 2020 Network Meeting, WHO has convened an Organizing Committee of representatives of a small number of Network Participants. The Organizing Committee has started to meet by teleconference. It will advise WHO on the goals of the meeting, the meeting programme including topics and speakers and assist with planning and logistics. Network Participants will have an opportunity (by survey) to contribute suggestions and preferences for the meeting programme.

Emerging Risks Task Group Starts Work

One of the objectives of the Network relates to the identification of emerging risks to human health from chemicals. Following the workshop on this topic held in February 2019, an Emerging Risks Task Group has been convened to facilitate follow up activities. The Task Group will meet by teleconference, develop a work plan for activities for the Network to take forward, share information about activities in their own institutions and coordinate activities as necessary. Reports from the work of the Task Group will be shared with Network Participants periodically.