



MESAEP

Mediterranean Scientific Association
of Environmental Protection

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Environmental health in industrially contaminated sites in Europe

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Early industrialization and poor environmental management practices have resulted in a multitude of sites that are heavily contaminated. In Europe, there are 340000 contaminated sites (CS) identified by the European Environment Agency. Assessments exist on the health impacts of some cases of CS, yet the overall impact of living in or close to a CS is still unknown, due to fragmentation of objectives and methods. It is urgent to promote cooperation among researchers and risk managers to identify common strategies at international level. In Italy, legislation on CS has been long in place, and national assessments have been done over at least two decades on national priority CS. The Italian SENTIERI study showed 10000 excess deaths (44 CS), and 10% excess of cancer incidence (23 CS), respectively over a ten, and an eight year-period. 60% of population living in the 300 municipalities comprised in 44 CS belongs to the highest deprivation groups. Building on this experience, and on expert consultation promoted by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and by the WHO Collaborating Centre for environmental health in contaminated sites, a COST Action "Industrially Contaminated Sites and Health Network" (ICSHNet) has been recently launched (http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/Actions/IS1408).

COST is the longest-running European framework supporting trans-national cooperation among researchers across Europe. The Action, coordinated by the Italian Institute of Health (ISS), aims at identifying priorities and guidance on transfer scientific evidence into the policy making process. Key aspects related to industrially CS (ICS) concern environmental contamination, economic development, social cohesion, poverty, health, well-being and social inequalities. This is because population subgroups with low socio-economic conditions often live in areas with high pollution and poor-quality housing, near industrial and waste dumping sites with limited access to a good quality health services and green space.

The Action ICSHNet already involves 22 EU countries, and counts on about one hundred scientists and environmental health experts from tens of research and public health institutions. Researchers with a leading role in the Mediterranean Scientific Association for Environmental Protection (MESAEP) are already involved in the Action. A key component of the MESAEP work is on emerging pollutants and CS and the related environmental management. Its involvement in the COST action will contribute significantly to both its outreach to the scientific and environmental policy communities across the Mediterranean, and to the incorporation of knowledge, expertise and experience in dealing with ICS in both sides of the Mediterranean basin.

Keywords: environmental health, industrial contamination, well-being and inequalities