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Finnish research programme on environmental health 1998–2001

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The Finnish Research Programme on Environmental Health (SYTTY) was established by the Academy of Finland in 1997 for the period 1998–2001. The aim of the program was to generate scientific information that would help with analyses of connections between the environment and human health. It also aimed at developing methods and techniques for promoting environmental health.

The program favored multidisciplinary approaches in studies on environmental health problems, which were often many-faceted problem chains. The research consortia funded by the program aimed at obtaining holistic pictures of important environmental health problems — from risk-causing activity to health impacts and their prevention and rectification.

Theme areas of research

The budget of the program was about EUR 8 million, which was distributed among 47 projects (figure 1). Sixty person-years were funded annually. The program had the following four priority themes, in which also consortia of several related projects were formed (figure 2):

- Urban air and fine particles (8 projects): Studies within this theme examined the risk chain from the sources of fine particles to transportation-exposure-effects-mechanisms of effects on humans. The work of these projects is described in this supplement issue.
- Indoor air (12 projects): Research on indoor air focused mainly on human exposure to bioaerosols and

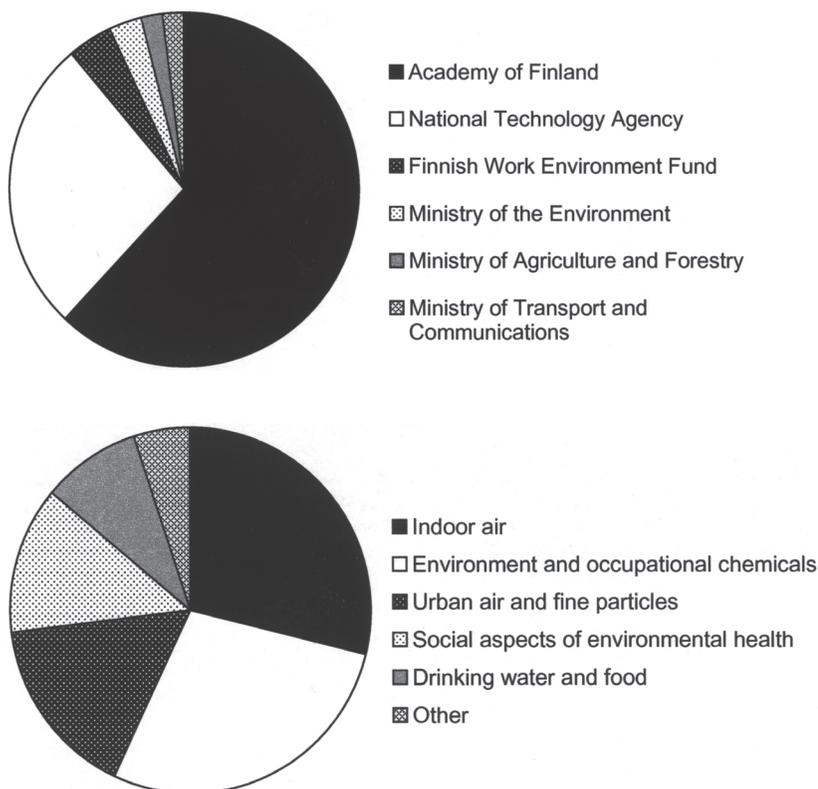


Figure 1. Program funding of EUR 8 million in 1998–2001.

Figure 2. Distribution of funding to the theme areas.

chemical pollutants in indoor air and on adverse health effects caused by them. Furthermore, mechanisms of pollutant-induced health effects were investigated. The social impact of the moldy house problem and technical solutions for improving indoor-air quality were topics of some projects.

- Drinking water (8 projects): Microbial pollutants in drinking water pose a continuous risk to human health. Sensitive biotechnological methods were developed for detecting pathogenic bacteria, viruses, and protozoa in systems distributing drinking water. The role of microbially available phosphorus was shown to be important for microbial growth. Health risks caused by chemical pollutants in drinking water were also studied. The new results have led to changes in the processes of water treatment plants and led to higher quality drinking water.
- Environmental and occupational chemicals (12 projects): Chemicals originating from the environment or work environments pose a health risk to humans. Several projects studied exposure to and mechanisms of the effects of dioxins. In addition, the risks of endocrine disruptors to male reproductive health were investigated. Some projects examined the chemical and biological rectification methods used for contaminated soils.

In addition to the priority themes, there were projects on occupational health, food safety, asthma and

allergy, solar ultraviolet radiation, and social aspects of environmental health problems.

Other activities

The program enhanced cooperation between the research teams. Several international and national workshops were organized in the theme areas; these workshops enabled an exchange of information about the newest results and the development of new research ideas. One of the most important activities was the training of doctoral students.

The results of the program have not only been distributed via scientific forums, but also utilized in national and European decision-making processes on important environmental health problems. In general, the program has increased scientific knowledge that is useful for environmental health promotion, risk assessment, and risk management.

Additional information about the program is available on its homepages: www.ktl.fi/syttu.

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