

E*nvironmental health effects in the east Baltic region —
assessment and prevention*

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The countries in the Baltic region form a geographic entity and, to some extent, share a common environment. In particular, the common environment is highlighted by transboundary air and water pollution. Over many centuries close contacts have developed between the countries surrounding the Baltic sea, and in many respects their cultural identity is similar. The recent political changes in the East Baltic region, including the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, further facilitate the potential for contacts and collaboration.

In 1991 the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences arranged a conference called "Environmental Toxicology and Health" together with the academies of sciences in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The conference documented a variety of environmental problems in the East Baltic region, but only very scarce information was available on possible health effects. There has been a dramatic increase in mortality in most East European countries, particularly among people of middle age, but it is not clear to what extent this increase is related to environmental pollution. Some projects, often based on international collaboration, have been initiated to investigate the environmental health problems in this region.

A workshop called "Environmental Health Effects in the East Baltic Region — Assessment and Prevention" was organized in Stockholm on 27—29 April 1997 by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. The participants included 23 scientists from Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, and the Czech Republic, as well as representatives of the World Health Organization. The workshop had an overall objective to assess the health impact of major environmental hazards in the East Baltic region and to set priorities for preventive action. The intent was not to be comprehensive, but to focus on some key topics, including air pollution, ionizing radiation, genotoxicity, heavy metals, and pesticides. Measures to relieve the problems were also considered important. Primarily the situation in the East Baltic region was discussed, but comparisons were also made with other countries in the Baltic Sea watershed. The East Baltic region was defined as parts of Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

Background reports on specific environmental health issues were prepared and distributed to the participants before the workshop. These reports were thoroughly reviewed during the workshop, and they form the basis for this supplement. A synopsis of the workshop focusing on measures to relieve environmental health problems in the East Baltic region has been published in *AMBIO*. Financial support for the Workshop was received from the Swedish Institute, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Stockholm County Council, and the Torsten and Ragnar Söderberg Foundation.

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