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Regional Office for Europe****Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes****Working Group on Water and Health**

Third Meeting

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Water supply and sanitation in short-term critical situations and adaptation to climate change**Progress report and future work of the Task Force on Extreme Weather Events****Submitted by the Chair of the Task Force on Extreme Weather Events¹****I. Introduction and proposed action by the Working Group**

1. The present document was prepared in accordance with the request of the Working Group on Water and Health, at its second meeting (Geneva, 2–3 July 2009), to the Task Force on Extreme Weather Events to present to the third meeting of the Working Group an assessment of the work achieved and a proposal for a future programme of work for 2011–2013 (see ECE/MP.WH/WG.1/2009/2 – EUR/09/5086340/4).

2. The document should be read together with the complete draft programme of work for 2011–2013 (ECE/MP.WH/WG.1/2010/L.3 – EUR/10/56335/XI). The Working Group is invited to comment on the information provided and to discuss proposed future activities. In particular the Working Group is invited to indicate clear priorities for future work for 2011–2013.

¹ The present document has been submitted after the official documentation deadline due to resource constraints.

II. Background

3. The Task Force on Extreme Weather Events was established by the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health at its first session (Geneva, 17–19 January 2007) with the following mandate:

(a) Share experience on, and identify, relevant local or national good practices regarding the safe operation of water supply and sanitation facilities in urban and rural areas that are subject to the impact of short-term critical situations and prepare guidelines to respond to short-term critical situations;

(b) Draft a strategy paper on how to cope with the potential impact of climate change and on adaptation and mitigation programmes for water supply and sanitation.

4. The Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea of Italy took the leadership of the Task Force, contributing to financial needs and chairing all meetings and activities that were performed to achieve its mandate.

III. Activities conducted and main results

5. The Task Force convened its first meeting in Rome on 21–22 April 2008, where participating countries took the decision of starting the process to develop, as main output of this activity, the Guidance on Water Supply and Sanitation in Extreme Weather Events.

6. Italy, the lead country, invited countries and organizations to join an ad hoc drafting group of experts to assist in the preparation of the guidance. The drafting group met twice, once in Madrid in October 2008, and again in Rome in February 2009.

7. The first draft of the guidance document was presented at the second meeting of the Working Group on Water. In order to facilitate the process of review and comments, a questionnaire was prepared by the Chair.

8. The Working Group entrusted the Task Force to further prepare and finalize the guidance document and to present a revised version to the Working Group's third meeting for endorsement before submitting it to the second session of the Meeting of the Parties for possible adoption.

9. At the second meeting of the Task Force (Geneva 27–28 October 2009), participating countries and international organizations were asked for further improvement of the Guidance.

10. To foster the involvement of experts from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), the Guidance (available in English and Russian) was presented at the workshop "Climate Change, Water and Health" hosted by the Romanian Ministry of the Environment and Forests back to back with the Joint Meeting of the European Union Water Initiative EECCA Working Group and the Environmental Action Programme Task Force's Group of Senior Officials for Water Sector Reform in EECCA of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)(Bucharest, 24–25 November 2009).

11. The involvement of water utilities was deemed crucial for the development of the Guidance. The European Federation of National Associations of Drinking Water Suppliers and Waste Water Services (EUREAU) hosted in London in January 2010 a meeting between the main authors of the Guidance and EUREAU climate change experts for further inputs.

12. A booklet was edited and printed by the Italian Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea to introduce the main issues and topics of the Guidance during the climate change

sessions at the Water and Health Protocol Day (Parma, Italy, 9 March 2010), organized in the context of the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Parma, Italy, on 10–12 March 2010.

13. The final draft of the Guidance will be available at the third meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health. It is expected that the document will be finalized in time for formal adoption at the second session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health (Bucharest, 23–25 November 2010).

14. The draft Guidance on Water Supply and Sanitation in Extreme Weather Events was made possible thanks to contributions from experts from Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The following specialized agencies also contributed: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Meteorological Organization, the World Health Organization—both Headquarters and the Regional Office for Europe—as did international (EUREAU) and national (Federutility) professional organizations dealing with utilities in water supply, drainage and sanitation. The NGO Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment also contributed.

IV. Lessons learned in the past three years and implications for future work programmes

15. The executive summary of the Guidance provides an overview of challenges in the pan-European region that the future work programme could address.

16. The health relevance of resilience of water services is confirmed by the recent initiative launched by WHO headquarters and summarized in the WHO publication *VISION 2030: The Resilience of Water Supply and Sanitation in the Face of Climate Change*. The publication, together with all supporting documentation, is available from URL: http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/9789241598422_cdrom/en/index.html. It can be provided as a CD on simple request.

17. In addition, a number of considerations and lessons can be drawn from the work of the Task Force in the past three years that could support the finalization of the future programme of work:

18. All partners consistently welcomed the Protocol initiative of providing the Guidance as a first tool to address the issue of water supply and sanitation in extreme weather events considering the following factors:

(a) The threats to the availability of safe water posed by the dramatic rise of the number of extreme events such as floods, windstorms, droughts and cold spell in the presence of lacking or low performing water supply and sanitation systems;

(b) The overall environment and health relevance of the issue and mostly, the integrated risk management needs in terms of the science and technology cooperation framework and problem awareness among relevant stakeholders such as environmental, climate and health professionals and utilities managers;

(c) The need to include water supply and sanitation risk management in adaptation strategies and long-term integrated water resource management;

(d) The persisting high vulnerability of many countries in terms of lack of access to drinking water, sanitation provision and coping capacity with recurring extreme weather events already affecting the pan-European region for decades;

(e) The need of actions in rural areas or areas served by small suppliers;

(f) The need to provide tools to assist countries to improve vulnerability assessments, strengthen coping capacities and assess and improve resilience against the impacts of climate change of water supply and sanitation systems.

19. Finally the need of Parties and non-Parties to be aware that the issue of water supply and sanitation under extreme weather conditions will require expertise from many disciplines, such as climate and early warning and water supply and sanitation provision management.

20. Considering the above, future areas of work could include, but should not be limited to the following:

(a) Development of decision-support tools to assess different options such as safe use of new water sources (desalination, groundwater recharge, use of treated wastewater in agriculture, rain harvesting);

(b) Development of tools for rapid post-event (drought, floods, windstorms) environment and health assessment impacts to support safe recovery actions and prompt management of health hazards;

(c) In line with the policy guidance provided by WHO in the publication *Vision 2030*, efforts could also be made to assist countries in the assessment of resilience against the impacts of climate change in current water supply and sanitation systems, as well as through strategic cooperation with relevant organizations such as OECD and UNDP;

(d) Cooperation with work in progress for the adaptation of water safety plans to include risks associated with the impacts of climate change on water supply and sanitation;

(e) Further development in the areas of health risk assessment and management with changing water quantity and quality under extreme critical conditions;

(f) Use of knowledge tools developed in the Guidance for capacity-building and exchange programmes.

21. The Task Force recognized in its discussion on future work that the area of adaptation to climate change and extreme weather events offers a broad range of opportunities for future work. At the same time, a wealth of actors are active in the area. Therefore, before deciding on specific activities in the future programme of work, it should be ensured that the framework of the Protocol offers a comparative advantage to work on such proposed activities and that numerous Parties to the Protocol recognize such activities as being of the highest priority and are firmly committed to work on them. Therefore it is proposed that the Working Group on Water and Health at its third meeting take into account the above suggestions but at the same time have a broad and strategic discussion on future engagement in this area, also considering the other proposed activities in the draft programme of work for 2011–2013.
