



PRESS RELEASE FOR LOCAL MEDIA

Central Michigan District Health Department
“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”

For more information, please call: (989) 773-5921 ext. 109
2012 E. Preston Avenue, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48858, www.cmdhd.org

To: Local Newspapers

From: Chris Lauckner, Health Education Services Director

**RE: Climate Change: Our Health in the Balance
Michigan’s Public Health Week
April 14 – April 22, 2008**

Release Date: April 3, 2008

There is a direct connection between climate change and the health of our nation today. Children, the elderly, the poor, and those individuals living with chronic health conditions are most at risk for negative health impacts of climate change. Extreme weather such as heat waves that could produce drought conditions, tornadoes, colder winters, and increased flooding caused by climate change can negatively affect soil temperature and moisture; challenging the food production system. Climate change can also increase the amount of ozone in the air. Air pollution, including ozone, can trigger events related to respiratory diseases, such as asthma, bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD], and emphysema.

What do you need to know?

Below are some facts been made available from the Michigan Department of Community Health and prepared for Michigan’s Public Health Week:

- Climate change is likely to effect the production of staple crops, including rice, wheat, corn, soybeans, and potatoes.
- Enduring changes in climate, water supply, distribution of pests and disease producing factors, as well as soil moisture will make it less likely to continue crop production in certain regions of the country.
- Farmers will need to adapt their crops and farming techniques to match the changes in precipitation, soil erosion, pests, and temperature.
- Current water management practices are likely to be inadequate to reduce the negative impacts of climate change on water supply reliability, flood risk, health, energy and water ecosystems.

- Heat ranks among the top weather-related killers in the United States, responsible for more deaths than hurricanes, lightning, tornadoes and floods combined.
- In 2006, the national Weather Service issued 10 Flash Flood Warnings and 38 Flood Warnings across the state of Michigan. The floods caused over \$2 million in economic and property damage.
- According to the Michigan Department of Community Health, 37 people in Michigan died due to exposure to cold in 2006.
- Availability of some food worldwide may lessen, causing increases in food costs and increasing the number of people who are in need of food.
- Ground-level ozone, referred to as “smog,” is created when mixed with a combination of air pollutants and “bake” in the hot summer sun. Typically, ozone levels are highest in Michigan during May through September.
- The elderly and children are the most affected by air pollution. About one-third of people with asthma in Michigan are children.
- Asthma affects more than 20 million Americans, almost a million in the state of Michigan.
- Asthma causes \$18 billion per year in direct and indirect healthcare costs, and more than 14 million missed school and workdays.

What steps can you take that will affect climate change and the health of our nation?

- Use water efficiently, both at home and at work. Only water your lawn when necessary and during the coolest part of the day; turn off the water while shaving or brushing your teeth, and repair water leaks right away in order not to waste valuable water resources.
- Use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly on your lawns and plants. Increased precipitation caused by climate change will lead to increased runoff and soil erosion, which leads to these chemicals entering lakes, streams and waterways.
- When gardening, elect plants and flowers that are suitable for the current climate to minimize use of fertilizers.
- Plant a tree – trees help by removing carbon dioxide from the air and help to reduce soil erosion.
- If you or someone you know, has asthma or another respiratory disease, learn to recognize what triggers their attacks.

- Make your indoor environment “lung healthy”
 - Keep your home smoke-free.
 - Vacuum regularly; use a HEPA filter if possible.
 - Dust with a damp cloth weekly.
 - Put your mattress, box springs and pillow in allergen-proof airtight or plastic covers.
- Stay “lung healthy” in Michigan’s outdoor environment.
 - Carpool, bus, walk or bicycle to work to save fuel.
 - Fill up your car’s gas tank in the evening to cut air pollution.
 - Keep your car maintained to manufacturer’s specifications and proper tire pressure to increase fuel efficiency.
 - Postpone mowing your lawn on high ozone days to cut air pollution.
 - Mow your lawn less often to cut air pollution.

In responding to climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] has developed tools to help individuals and families reduce greenhouse gas emissions and take action. One tool, found to be most helpful is an online “Personal Emissions Calculator”

[\[http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html\]](http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html).

The Personal Emissions Calculator suggests what families and individuals can do at home to help protect our climate. The calculator estimates greenhouse emissions for yourself and/or family as well as offering actions you and/or your family can take to lower your emissions while reducing your energy and waste disposal costs.

For each action taken, the calculator displays the amount of emissions avoided and how that amount relates to you and/or your family’s total emissions.

Finally, a major question that should be asked is: “Am I and are my family and friends prepared for a disaster?” There are real benefits to being prepared. Being prepared can reduce fear, anxiety, and losses that accompany disasters. Families and individuals should be ready to evacuate their homes, take refuge in public shelters, and know how to care for their basic medical needs. The need to prepare is “real”. Disasters disrupt hundreds of thousands of lives every year. Each disaster has lasting effects, both to people and property. If a disaster occurs, local government and disaster-relief organizations will try to help but local responders may not be able to reach you immediately, or they may need to focus their

efforts on other situations. It is important that individuals can take care of themselves for at least three days and that may mean providing for shelter, first aid, food, water, and sanitation.

Being *ready* to respond to emergencies includes creating a family disaster plan and accounting for family members not at home when a warning is issued. Important issues that a disaster plan should address are:

- Escape routes
- Family communications
- Utility shut-off and safety
- Insurance and vital records
- Special needs
- Caring for animals
- Safety Skills

The connections between climate change and public health are clear. The consequences of climate change on the health of our communities, our families, friends, and children are real. In knowing the connections and the consequences, individuals and families can make choices and lead life-styles that are healthy for themselves and the climate.

For further information, please refer to: Central Michigan District Health Department – “Fact Sheets”: www.cmdhd.org

National Public Health Week website: www.nphw.org

Michigan Department of Community Health website: www.mdch.gov

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality website: www.michigan.gov/deq

Michigan Environmental Council website: www.environmentalcouncil.org

American Lung Association of Michigan website: www.alam.org

Asthma Initiative of Michigan website: www.getastmahelp.org

Be Ready Campaign website: www.ready.gov

This article was provided by the staff at Central Michigan District Health Department, which serves residents in Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola and Roscommon Counties.

###