DEPARTEMENT
OMGEVING

Vlaamse overheid
T 02 553 80 11
omgeving@vlaanderen.be

Report

PFAS-EVENT: WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNICATION

Date: 1.02.2024

Moderator: Tim De Winter
Reporter: Yanti Simanjuntak

Subject: Health and Communication

PFAS-EVENT: WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNICATION

Knowledge about (risk of) health effects of PFAS is being built. It remains a challenge to adequately assess the health risks of PFAS, partly because of the different properties per specific PFAS, the impossibility to predict health effects at the individual level based on amount of exposure or blood levels of PFAS, and the multifactorial nature of the relevant health effects.
How to decide which actions are useful for the protection of the population and individuals involved and how to convey the complex message - all the more since treatment is not possible and exposure limiting measures are advised - will be discussed. The accumulated expertise, conducted research and future actions regarding PFAS and health in the 3M area and Flanders will be discussed.

Bart Bautmans – Department of Care: setting the scene

- Mandate for actions is needed and should be anchored in legislation
- Interdisciplinary approach ('health in all policies') & coöperation (in-house & external partners)
- Discussion: what is the acceptibility of risk? We have to gain trust of the people who strongly depend on/believe in science

Dr. Irina Zasenskaya – WHO: Public Health relevance of Chemical Safety

- Human biomonitoring is one of WHO priorities in order to improve assessment of exposure to and health risks from chemicals of public health concern and promote relevant risk reduction decisions, based on new studies, reviews and guidelines
- 2023 Budapest Declaration on Environment and Health: roadmap for healthier people, a thriving planet and a sustainable future 2023 – 2030
- IARC carcinogenic re-evaluation of PFOA & PFOS: will be published in 2024
- Study on endocrine disruptors: new report on short-term and long-term exposure to be finalised by 2026
- Guideline in drinking water: the provisional guideline value should not be interpreted as the lowest concentrations of PFOA and PFOS that can be achieved with available treatment technologies
- PFAS in food: updated WHO review
- WHO breast milk monitoring programme: continuous survey generating data from 82 countries

Dr. Gisella Pitter – Veneto Region: How to set up a health based surveillance on a environmental PFAS-problem

- After long-term pollution of groundwater sources for drinking water due to releasing wastewater of a PFAS-production plant in the region, results of environmental investigations in 2013 lead to a large-scale health surveillance program
- The strengths of having a centralised organisation, a clearly-defined protocol and decision thresholds led to the trust of the exposed population that the health institutions take care of them
- The generation of a high workload and a large cost are serious drawbacks
- Communication is very important: people tend to attribute any health problem to PFAS and there is no simple and affordable screening test for some diseases associated with PFAS exposure

Ilona Gabaret – Department of Care: a systemic approach from PFAS-monitoring to health surveillance

- Environmental measurements and investigations can be a basis for human biomonitoring, taking into account several important steps and precautions
- A model-based approach was followed by advising no regret-measurements in the affected region
- Human biomonitoring should be approached carefully by checking 4 important goals first: contribution to general health care, to a policy goal, to a society goal and to a scientific goal
- Finally, human biomonitoring can be a basis for regional public health surveillance
- Framing the concept and messages to the public (communication) are essential points

1.1.1 Thomas Lambrechts and Marie Jailler – Wallonie environnement: implementing a PFAS-action plan

- Reaching new PFAS guidelines for soil studies in december 2023
- Deriving a guideline value in soil: from chemical behaviour in the environment to exposure scenarios and toxicological reference values
- Issues in soil legislation: scientific knowledge about PFAs is quickly evolving and assesment of risks is getting more challenging (cfr BATNEEC-principle) and requires a pragmatic approach

1.1.2 Ard van Pelt – GGD Zeeland: Group discussion

- Discussion on human biomonitoring (HBM): HBM makes an environmental exposure personal but is rarely to be interpreted on a personal level
- Communication of results to patients needs careful consideration
- HBM is a population health surveillance tool but it should not be treated lightly

PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNICATION - CONCLUSIONS

- Interdisciplinary approach ('health in all policies') & including different settings and partners (in-house and external) is key
- Changing scientific points of view and stricter exposure limits require a pragmatic approach to tackling environmental PFAS pollution
- 'Acceptibility of risk' should be a discussion with and for people who strongly depend on/believe in science
- Human biomonitoring (HBM) as a population health surveillance can be a basis for regional public health surveillance but is not to be taken lightly
- HBM should be approached by checking 4 important goals first: does it contribute to general health care, does it contribute to a policy goal, does it contribute to a society goal and does it contribute to a scientific goal
- HBM and blood sampling as such can never answer all exposure routes on a personal level
- Framing the concept of HBM and communication of results are very important: people tend to attribute any health problem to PFAS and there is no simple and affordable screening test for some diseases associated with PFAS exposure – there is als no treatment for PFAS in the human body
- Human exposure monitoring can't be done without environmental data: contribution from external partners and collaboration between health departments, scientific institutions and environmental agencies

ANNEX 1 – PRESENTATIONS

- Flanders Department of Health, Belgium - Ilona Gabaret
- Flanders Department of Health, Belgium - Bart Bautmans
- VENETO Region, Italy - Vanessa Groppi and Gisella Pitter
- World Health Organisation - Irina Zastenskaya
- Soil and Waste Wallonia, Belgium and Spaque - Thomas Lambrechts_Marie Jailler
- GGD Zeeland - Ard van Pelt

ANNEX 2 – LIST OF PARTICPANTS

Flemish Government

- Departement Omgeving
- OVAM
- VMM
- Departement Zorg

ABO

APPLiA

ARCHE Consulting

Arkema

BAYER AGRICULTURE BV

Bruxelles Environnement

Cefic

Chemours

COMMON FORUM on Contaminated Land in Europe

Cornet & Renard

Elegis-Huybrechts, Engels, Craen & Vennoten

Environment Agency Austria

Essenscia

EURATEX

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Europese Commissie

Finnish Environment Institute

FOD Volksgezondheid en Leefmilieu

German Environment Agency (UBA)

Growth Inc.

Hasselt University

Indaver

Jan De Nul / Envisan

Liedekerke Wolters Waelbroeck Kirkpatrick

Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management

MSD Animal Health

Sarp Industries

Sciensano

SMART

SPAQUE SA

SPW - Direction de l'Assainissement des Sols

Tectero BV

University of Antwerp

Veneto Region, Italy

Veolia Environmental Services Belux NV

Vewin (Dutch Association of water companies)

VITO

VMM

Witteveen+Bos Belgium nv

Zwijndrecht Gezond