



Children's
Environmental
Health
Network

October 15, 1997

The Honorable William J. Clinton
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The evidence continues to mount that emissions of “greenhouse gases” due to human activities are significantly altering the earth’s climate. By the year 2100, average global temperatures are projected to rise by 2.0°C (range 1.0-3.5°C). While these projections, based upon complicated models, contain some uncertainties, there is increasing agreement that global changes are occurring in climate.

The resulting impacts on the levels of rainfall, sea levels, temperature and other environmental impacts have been widely discussed. The Children’s Environmental Health Network is concerned that frequently absent from these discussions are the potential public health repercussions of global climate change. The impacts of global climate change on public health are expected to be multiple, adverse, and to disproportionately affect children.

As you are deciding upon the specific proposal which the United States will take to the global climate change summit in Kyoto, Japan, in December, the Network strongly urges you to take into account the anticipated impact of global climate change on the nation’s and the world’s children.

Public health experts have identified likely human health hazards that may pose greater challenges to public health as a result of global climate change:

- an increase in cases of heat-related mortality and morbidity;
- an expansion of the incidence of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever;
- a higher incidence of water-borne cholera and other infectious agents due to increased surface water temperatures;
- an increase in cases of malnutrition;
- additional asthma attacks and respiratory problems due to worsening air quality; and
- additional episodes of contaminated food and water due to extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, affecting sanitation, and increased migration.

In every one of these areas, children will be the most vulnerable and are likely to suffer the most. The public health tragedies resulting from global climate change are likely to fall heaviest on our youngest citizens.

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These serious potential impacts of climate change, presenting formidable public health challenges, can be prevented or mitigated through strong precautionary actions that would prevent further climate change.

We urge you, therefore, to work toward an internationally binding and verifiable agreement establishing targets and timetables for meaningful reductions in emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases. We also support increased efficiency in the use and production of energy and accelerated development and transfer of energy-saving and renewable energy technologies.

It will be the children of the world who will be the first to experience the impacts of global climate change -- and to be the most acutely harmed. For their sake, we strongly urge you to act to prevent the potential public health disasters resulting from global climate change.

Joy E. Carlson, MPH

Executive Director