

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RISKS OF THE ARCTIC ASSESSED

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The Arctic Council held its meeting in Inari (Finland) in October 2002. The second report of the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) was presented there, including a substantial section focusing on human health. AMAP is one of the first international monitoring programmes to design and implement a monitoring programme covering all major ecological systems and all major contaminant groups. A conclusion of the results of the programme is presented as an invited review in this issue.

Pollution in the Arctic is a possible health risk to Arctic inhabitants. One result of the programme is the finding that subtle effects at a sub-clinical level are present in some highly exposed Arctic populations. Consequently, the current human exposure to the existing levels and mixture of contaminants affects the health of humans in a negative way. In consideration of the potential effects on future generations, efforts to reduce the entry of persistent substances into the Arctic ecosystems should be accelerated. So far, pollution as an Arctic Health risk has got its analysed frames. More research work is still needed, but the rough picture of it as a health risk is now known.

Arctic climatic risks will be reported globally by the Arctic Climatic Impact Assessment project in 2003. Two reviews and two separate articles in this issue deal with cold weather, an environmental climatic health risk in the Arctic. As an invited review "Winter mortality and its causes" describes its most serious consequences, deaths. The populations in the article are mostly from the European temperate zone, but it describes the important relationship between increased mortality and seasonal decrease of environmental temperature in

winter. Dr. Näyhä's report "Cold and the risk of cardiovascular diseases" rounds up the series of 10 separate articles based on presentations at a workshop on performance in cold in 2000. These articles are published in issues 60(3), 61(2), 61(3) and 61(4) of *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*. Also the report on hospitalized frostbites documents the importance of cold injuries in the north also associated with the modern urban life style. An actual cold exposure may be also a source of enjoyment. The article by Hirvonen and coworkers on winter swimming gives new scientific information about this common Arctic leisure time activity.

The present stage of the Arctic Survey of infectious diseases will be described in volume 62 of this Journal. Radionuclide waste may even be a global Arctic health risk. The risk they pose will be described in this Journal in the future.

Greenland's strong health research is featured in this issue in three separate articles related to schoolchildren's drinking habits, iodine intake and spina bifida, folate intake and metabolism.

Volume 61: four periodical issues and two supplements with a total of about 680 pages is at the same level as volume 60, the highest in the Journal's history. It is one basic element for the analyses of the Journal's future. These analyses and plans for the future will be described in issue 62(1).