

Protecting people and planet from ‘invisible killer’ is focus of UN health campaign to tackle air pollution



A hazy day in Beijing increases the urgency of air pollution control. World Bank/Photo: Wu Zhiyi

20 October 2016 – The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with the Coalition for Climate and Clean Air (CCAC) and the Government of Norway has launched a global awareness campaign on the dangers of air pollution – especially ‘invisible killers’ such as black carbon, ground-level ozone and methane – for the health of individuals and the planet.

Titled [BreatheLife: Clean air. A healthy future](#), the campaign aims to mobilize cities and their inhabitants on issues of health and protecting the planet from the effects of air pollution. Moreover, By WHO and CCAC joining forces, ‘BreatheLife’ brings together expertise and partners that can tackle both the climate and health impacts of air pollution.

According to WHO, air pollution kills nearly seven million people each year, nearly 12 per cent of deaths worldwide. It is responsible for 35 per cent of deaths due to lung disease, 27 per cent of deaths from heart disease, 34 per cent of deaths from stroke, and 36 per cent of deaths from lung cancer.

Urban air pollution levels also tend to be higher in many low and middle-income cities and in poor neighbourhoods of high-income cities. This means reductions in pollutants can have particularly large health benefits for lower income groups as well as for children, elderly, and women, the agency explains.

The campaign seeks to cut in half the number of deaths from air pollution by 2030 – the target year for the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015.

‘Breathe Life’ highlights the practical policies that cities can implement to improve the air quality through better housing, transport infrastructure, managements of waste and energy systems. It also educates individuals and communities about the measures they can take daily to achieve cleaner air, such as stopping the incineration of waste, development of green spaces and the choice of walking or cycling.



Nine in ten people breathe air that is not safe. Air pollution is an invisible killer that we may face on a simple walk home or even in our homes.

Improved vehicle standards, prioritization of clean public transport, and the adoption of stoves and more efficient alternative fuel for cooking, lighting and heating are also part of the actions put forward by the campaign the goal of saving more lives and protect the environment.

For WHO and its partners, this series of measures to achieve a reduction of pollutants could significantly reduce the number of annual deaths from air pollution.

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