



GEOSS

Dynamic New Global System Detailed By WFPHA Partner At 11TH World Health Congress

by Madelyn Applebaum

"For the United States and every nation, there is no more important issue than public health. Public health challenges often transcend geographic barriers. So do environmental challenges. These are challenges being met head on by the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), which has the support of 65 nations, the European Commission and 43 international organizations. It is a dynamic new network, an international cooperative effort designed to gather information that will increase the public health of people all across the globe. I hope you will work with us to learn how to make the best possible use of GEOSS when you return to your home countries."

*The Honorable Mika Leavitt
U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services in a
statement addressed to delegates to the 11th World
Health Congress and 8th Brazilian Congress
of Collective Health
August 22, 2006—Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

News about GEOSS, an emerging global environmental initiative, was reported to delegates in Brazil by retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D., Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Vice Admiral told delegates that one of the most pressing needs for improving public health is to bring together, in one system, the many disparate entities that include health and environmental data and observations. "The health of the human species," he said, "is linked directly to the health and condition of our planet. We must connect the scientific dots to better understand the links between the environment and health. Once we do, working collaboratively, we will make significant advances in prevention, early warning and more rapid problem-solving."

WFPHA and NOAA, along with APHA, Yale University, the World Health Organization, and other partners, have joined in developing a biodiversity and health research initiative led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. With the loss of biodiversity accelerating even as infectious diseases appear to be emerging and reemerging at a faster pace, examining potential relationships between changes in biodiversity and human health may lead to broader understanding of how to reduce global public health risks.

Lautenbacher said the new research effort complements the development of GEOSS. By linking the many thousands of technological assets now working individually around the globe, GEOSS is emerging as an end-to-end system that will provide the sound science on which sound policy must be built. "I predict GEOSS will become a vital tool to help meet health challenges more effectively," Lautenbacher said.

Integrating information through improved global monitoring of viruses in wildlife may help prevent epidemics of avian flu. Data on conditions that increase mosquito populations can be factored into prevention measures where diseases such as malaria are endemic. Data on air pollution can be factored into early warnings for cardiovascular and respiratory responses. Data on ecosystem diversity can be a factor in detecting the next emerging diseases. GEOSS is expected to yield socio-economic benefits to many sectors, including weather and climate forecasting, natural disaster mitigation, and management of energy and water resources, all of which will benefit global public health. 

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