

The Conference program will also feature topical sessions, including both oral and poster presentations, focusing on strategies for disaster mitigation. The following major topics will be reviewed: vulnerable communities, hazard-resistant construction, the inter-relationships between technological and natural hazards, economic implications of disaster reduction for sustainable development, warning systems, drought management, the effects of disasters on modern societies (megacities, information systems, communications, and insurance), and the public and private sector interface in disaster prevention and preparedness.

The topical sessions will also address actions to achieve the targets of the Dec-

ade, as specified by the IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee and adopted by the UN General Assembly. The targets are that by the year 2000, all countries should have in place: (1) a comprehensive national assessment of risks from natural hazards, which is taken into account in development plans; (2) mitigation plans at national and/or local levels, involving long-term prevention and preparedness and community awareness; and (3) ready access to global, regional, national, and local warning systems and broad dissemination of warnings.

It is hoped that the Conference will be a major step toward achieving the goal stated in its theme—"A Safer World for the 21st Century."

951



First Inter-American Water Day

The Pan American Health Organization, in cooperation with the Inter-American Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering (AIDIS) and the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA), sponsored the Region's first Inter-American Water Day on Saturday, 2 October 1993. This event—which is to be celebrated annually on the first Saturday of October—highlighted the importance of water as one of the key factors in good health. The purpose of Inter-American Water Day is to educate the general public about the proper and efficient use of water and to encourage the development of permanent activities at the community level that emphasize conservation and protection of water resources.

This special observance was created through an Inter-American Water Day

Declaration signed by the three sponsoring organizations at the XXIII Inter-American AIDIS Congress in Havana, Cuba, held in November 1992. The Declaration calls on all governments, international agencies, nongovernmental organizations, municipalities, private sector entities, and communities to take advantage of Inter-American Water Day to "call attention to the problems relating to drinking water supply and the conservation and protection of water resources." The Declaration urges these groups to use the Day as an opportunity to carry out public education and information activities to heighten awareness of how individuals can contribute to the conservation of water and protect themselves against waterborne diseases.

The onset of the cholera epidemic in Peru in early 1991, less than 40 days after

the conclusion of the 1981–1990 period designated as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD), called attention to persisting deficiencies in clean water supplies and basic sanitation services, particularly among the Region's poor. An evaluation of the IDWSSD, conducted in late 1989 to ascertain the level of coverage of drinking water supply and sanitary excreta disposal services achieved by the countries of the Americas during the Decade, revealed that urban water supply services through household connections and public sources (access within 200 meters of the dwelling) reached 88% of the population, while urban sewerage services and other means of excreta disposal reached 80%. In rural areas, 55% of the population had water supply, primarily through public sources, while sanitary excreta disposal services reached 32% of the population.

Advances in the development of these services vary widely from country to country, and the reported coverage does not necessarily represent services of adequate quantity or quality. A considerable proportion of water supply services function intermittently, and many do not regularly disinfect the water. Losses in urban water systems due to leaks and undetermined factors are estimated at 40%–60% of production. In approximately 75% of water supply services, the disinfection processes do not function continuously and effectively. Moreover, only 5%–10% of sewerage systems have treatment facilities. The discharge of untreated wastewater is a critical problem in all countries, especially discharges originating in large metropolitan areas and industrial cities, owing to the large volume of waste produced. Surface and ground waters are also polluted by municipal solid waste, especially where it is disposed of with no controls or directly into bodies of water. Water contaminated

with disease-causing agents and toxic industrial and agricultural chemicals poses a health risk to large segments of the population in the Americas.

Two types of interventions have proven particularly effective in improving the safety of the water supply: community participation and health education. Experience at the country level indicates that these two strategies must be pursued more vigorously in the future.

In some countries of Latin America, community participation in water supply and rural sanitation services is traditional, while participation in urban areas has been limited or absent in almost all countries. In a few cases, cooperatives have been formed which take an active role in efforts to provide water and sewerage services. In community-based projects, women have played a key role in analyzing the problem, defining possible solutions, and implementing projects. Communities have a vested interest in securing access to clean drinking water. Experience in several countries worldwide has demonstrated that community participation at all stages—construction, operation, maintenance, and management—is essential for ensuring sustained services.

During the IDWSSD, it was confirmed that adequate and pertinent health education at the primary and secondary levels was necessary in order to derive the greatest health benefits from water supply and sanitation services. In its evaluation of the Decade, PAHO reported that at least 18 countries in the Region had insufficient health education activities. In several cases, the institutions responsible for water supply have taken an innovative approach to this problem, including the preparation of special curricula on environmental and sanitary education for use in primary and secondary schools. Clearly, teachers need to have access to special training enabling them to discuss

confidently with their students all aspects of health related to water and the environment.

Another finding of the IDWSSD evaluation was that there is still somewhat limited linkage of community/women's participation and health education with primary health care. Water supply and sanitation projects will need to be more effectively integrated in their design, planning, and execution with other pri-

mary health care focuses, such as food and nutrition and maternal and child health care.

It is hoped that the observance of Inter-American Water Day each October in future years will be not just a one-day event but rather the culmination of a year-long program of activities designed to raise awareness and motivate the public to conserve and preserve water resources.

952

INDEXED



Health Promotion Conference and Charter for the English-speaking Caribbean

A historic conference on health promotion for the countries participating in the Caribbean Cooperation in Health (CCH) initiative was held in Trinidad on 1–4 June 1993. This First Caribbean Conference on Health Promotion was sponsored by PAHO and hosted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. One of the primary achievements of the Conference was the drafting of a Caribbean Health Promotion Charter, which was finalized after a process of review in the countries and then approved by the Caucus of Caribbean Ministers of Health in September 1993.

The Conference was attended by 133 persons from the Caribbean health, development, agriculture, education, and media sectors, as well as representatives of universities in the subregion and private sector and nongovernmental orga-

nizations. Staff from PAHO, the Canadian Health Promotion Directorate, and the Wales Health Promotion Authority also participated. The Conference was chaired by Dr. Karen Sealey, PAHO's Caribbean Program Coordinator, and featured addresses by the Honorable John Eckstein, Minister of Health of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Carlyle Guerra de Macedo, Director of PAHO, and Mr. Frank Abdulah, Deputy Secretary General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

The design of the Conference favored a high level of interaction among participants. It was structured into three broad phases:

- plenary presentations on health issues and social trends, health promotion concepts, and selected examples of applications in the Caribbean;
- meetings of multisectoral working groups to discuss and develop a common understanding of and framework for health promotion and to identify issues, elements, and

Source: Draft Charter now a reality thanks to health promotion conference held in Trinidad. *CCH Update* May-August 1993;6(2):2–3.