

# St. Mary's County Health Department

## NEWS RELEASE

[www.smchd.org](http://www.smchd.org)

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### **PUBLIC HEALTH TO HIGHLIGHT CONNECTION BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND OUR HEALTH**

Public Health Heroes will be honored at annual breakfast

LEONARDTOWN, MD (April 1, 2008) – St. Mary's County Health Department will be celebrating National Public Health Week April 7 – 13. This year's celebration will focus on environmental issues, and specifically the global health impact of climate change. A Public Health Heroes Breakfast, will be held during the week to honor 16 individuals and organizations who are committed to policies and everyday choices that demonstrate their commitment to being good stewards of our environment.

"Most Americans are unaware of the connection between the way we lead our lives, our impact on the planet, and the planet's impact on our health," said William Icenhower, M.D., St. Mary's health officer. According to the American Public Health Association (APHA), climate change may cause extreme weather events and changes in rainfall that increase the risk of death and disease. These effects and impacts will vary by region and location – creating different public health threats and challenges across the country and around the world.

In the United States, rising temperatures in the Northeast could mean a harder time for people with allergies, while diseases carried by insects or animals – such as Lyme disease and West Nile virus –

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could extend their reach. In the Southeast, hurricanes and other weather events are expected to last longer and be more intense, which could lead to bigger storm surges, greater damage to buildings and roads, and contaminated food and water.

The APHA warns that climate change also impacts human health not only by region, but also according to the relative vulnerability of different populations. Children, the elderly, the poor, and those with chronic health conditions are considered to be more at risk.

The scientific community is in agreement that human activity is playing a role in climate change. Energy consumption and its bi-product, carbon monoxide, are a big culprit, and people are beginning to value “going green” as a choice they can make to lessen their impact on the environment.

“The idea of reversing the direction of a changing climate is overwhelming,” acknowledges Dr. Icenhower, but, like our Public Health Heroes being honored this week, individuals are realizing they do not have to stand by helplessly.” St. Mary’s County Health Department is hoping to raise awareness about public health’s response to these health threats, and motivate people to take individual responsibility for adopting a lifestyle, and considering choices that are friendlier to the environment. “The fact is that very often, what’s good for the climate is good for your health too,” Dr. Icenhower explained.

The following healthy choices will help you reduce your impact on the environment and create a healthier lifestyle:

- **Be Prepared.** Inform yourself about the health impacts of climate change and regional climate change issues facing your community. Take action to prepare for possible disasters.
- **Travel Differently.** Leave the car at home and take public transportation instead. Walk or bike – if you need to drive, carpool – and, if you can, telecommute.

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- **Eat Differently.** Buy food from a local community farmer's market. Eat more vegetables and less meat.
- **Green Your Work.** Use recycled paper if you don't already, and even if you do, print less often and on both sides of the paper. Set your computer to energy saver mode and buy eco-friendly office furniture.
- **Green Your Home.** Insulate your home so that energy isn't literally going out the window. Reduce your use of wasteful products, reuse or recycle the products you do use and conserve water.

To learn more about National Public Health Week 2008 visit [www.nphw.org](http://www.nphw.org).

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