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## **MEETING SUMMARY**

### **ALASKA CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION ADVISORY GROUP**

#### **Health and Culture Technical Working Group (HC TWG)**

Meeting #6, 17 September 2008, 8:30 – 10:30 AM

#### **Attendance:**

Technical Working Group members: Bob Gerlach, Erin Harman, Joe McLaughlin, Jim Simon, Kristie Ebi

Public Attendees: Lynn Zender

#### **Background documents:**

Meeting Notice and Agenda

Summary of Meeting #5

Health and Culture Draft Catalog of State Actions

#### **Procedural items:**

1. Kristie Ebi called the meeting to order, completed the roll call, and reviewed the agenda and plans for the call.
2. The summary for meeting #5 was approved.

#### **Discussion items and key issues:**

1. The call discussed Health options HC-4 (food security, food safety, and foodborne diseases), HC-5 (flooding and other extreme weather events); HC-6 (thermal extremes); HC-7 (air quality and wildfires); HC-8 (toxic exposures); and HC-9 (mental stress).
2. Discussion on HC-4:
  - a. Rename, including food safety in the title.
  - b. A research is needed to better understand how climate change could affect the nutritional value of food, particularly traditional foods. This issue was discussed last year in the Alaska Forum.
  - c. A possible adaptation option is to implement a monitoring system for food security, including micronutrient availability.
  - d. An issue of growing concern is that animal and fish pathogens are

affecting the appearance of foods, leading to questions of whether the food is safe.

- e. There was a discussion of the increasing problem with ichthyophonus in salmon.
- f. Increased monitoring of animal and fish health could facilitate early identification of potential human health impacts.

3. Discussion on HC-5:

- a. It should be noted that floods also bring benefits and are a normal part of environmental processes. Floods replenish lakes, supply water, and provide other important benefits.
- b. One issue to highlight in education is that health risks can result from flooding of dumpsites.

4. Discussion on HC-6:

- a. Increasing climate variability may result in some areas becoming colder.
- b. Increasing summer temperatures are leading to more swimming, increasing exposure to waterborne pathogens. After break-up time, leachate from dumpsites can contaminate adjacent rivers; this has been observed to increase the prevalence of rashes in children who go swimming. There is a need for education on swimming safety.
- c. Research is needed on how increasing temperatures could affect wildlife and fish health, and how any changes could affect the quality and safety of food sources (see comment re ichthyophonus).
- d. Traditional knowledge is a rich source of hypotheses that can be tested on the impacts of climate change.

5. Discussion on HC-7:

- a. Precipitation can reduce the effectiveness of waste burning, leading to increased exposures to toxics. Policies on burn boxes should be reviewed to ensure they are appropriate in a changing climate. In addition, research is needed on the potential impacts of climate change on open burning of wastes and the release of contaminants.
- b. Smoke from wildfires can affect hunting opportunities. Wildfires are not an approved reason for altering the hunting and fishing seasons for subsistence communities. The regulations on governing opening and closing dates need to be revisited to ensure exceptions cover wildfires and other conditions that can lead to insufficient food for the winter. Not having enough food for the winter should be considered an emergency exception.
- c. Add volcanic emissions to 7.4.

6. Discussion on HC-8

- a. Research is needed on the health and cultural impacts of exposure to

leachates from dumpsites. In some rural communities, there is the perception that subsistence food sources are contaminated, leading to decreased reliance on these foods. Research is needed on whether subsistence foods are contaminated, the source of contamination, and, if contaminated, whether the foods are still safe under certain conditions.

- b. The Food CAP (Contaminants Assessment Program) is no longer funded, but is still needed.
  - c. Expanded biomonitoring is needed for toxic exposures, including lead, mercury, and PCBs. For each toxic, biomonitoring should be conducted on the most effective and efficient source. For example, biomonitoring for mercury in fish is more effective and less costly than biomonitoring in humans.
  - d. There is a concern about contaminants contained in permafrost and whether there is sufficient monitoring of their concentrations to identify potential problems before melting results in their release.
7. Discussion on HC-9
- a. For many rural communities, an abundance of wild resources is important to mental health.

**Next steps and agreements:**

1. The next TWG meeting will be held on October 1, from 8:30 - 10:00 am, and will focus on cultural options.