

UN agencies join forces against environmental risks that cause 12.6 million deaths a year

Two United Nations agencies are combining their expertise to counter the growing threat of extreme weather, climate change and air pollution, which cause more than 12.6 million deaths a year, it was announced on Thursday.

The legal agreement, signed by the World Meteorological Organization ([WMO](#)) and the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) in Geneva, commits the agencies to protect communities using “relevant and authoritative” data on the weather, climate and atmosphere.

WMO spokesperson Clare Nullis said that there was a “lot of political will” between the heads of the two organizations – WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas, and WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus – who shook on the deal on Wednesday after “decades of collaboration” between the agencies.

In practical terms the arrangement will ensure a better flow of information between the agencies, Ms Nullis explained, adding that air pollution and UV forecasts from national weather centres, reach the health professionals on the ground “who are dealing on a daily basis, with the impact of environmental risks to health”.

In a statement released on Thursday, WMO said that the deal’s “overarching aim” was to promote policies and practices which are beneficial “both to public health and which cut greenhouse gases”.

One of the initiative’s main targets is to prevent people dying prematurely from illnesses related to air pollution including strokes, heart disease respiratory conditions and cancer.

Annually, an estimated seven million people die from air-pollution related diseases, WMO noted.

The agency also highlighted the threat from climate change, noting that Hurricane Maria claimed 64 lives in Puerto Rico last September, only for new research to reveal that it actually led to more than 4,600 deaths, “because of a breakdown in healthcare, electricity and infrastructure”.

WMO’s role in coordinating Member States’ seasonal rainfall and temperature forecasts will also help in the fight against many diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, which depend on these variables.

Similarly, scientific drought predictions could help protect farming communities during the dry season, while extreme heat warnings are

increasingly used to reduce the health impact of heatwaves.

In its statement WMO noted that the plan is line with internationally agreed [Sustainable Development Goals](#), and their focus on helping populations to implement disaster risk reduction measures and adjust to climate change.

This involves placing “special emphasis” on reaching the most vulnerable populations in developing countries, Small Island Developing States and urban areas.