Health impact of current levels of air pollution is well established mostly through epidemiological studies from all over the world. Short-term effects like increase in respiratory symptoms, small impairments in lung function, increases in hospital admissions and emergency calls for respiratory diseases, asthma medication use, school absenteeism, and mortality from respiratory and circulatory causes have been consistently shown in time-series and panel studies. Effect estimates are usually small but because exposure is widespread and health endpoints concerned are rather frequent, even these small effects pose a major threat to population’s health.

Long-term effects studied mostly in cohort studies and underpinned by findings from cross-sectional studies are stronger, although in Europe, robust studies are not numerous.

Encouraging sound policy, unbiased and easy-to-understand information for decision makers, health professionals and the general public is vital, albeit not easy to achieve. Communication should neither evoke unreasonable fears nor should it neglect real risks, thus uncertainties on all levels should clearly be explained.

The EU-sponsored Aphekom project (Public Health Program EC grant agreement 2007105) has been set out to develop and deliver new, reliable and actionable information and tools so decision makers can set more effective local and European policies, health professionals can better advise vulnerable groups, and individuals can make better-informed decisions.

Aphekom builds on the experiences from the former Apheis project (www.apheis.net) and adds new exposure and health models, economic evaluation and considerations about uncertainties in the use of the project outcomes for public participation processes.

An Aphekom web-site is under preparation.