

Healthy Cities Contest Seeks Entrants

Third International "Active Cities, Healthy Cities" Contest will honor efforts to improve the environment and quality of life for urban residents

Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 20, 2008 (PAHO) – "Towns and cities in Latin America and the Caribbean are invited to enter the Third International "Active Cities, Healthy Cities" Contest, which recognizes and promote initiatives aimed at improving the urban environment and enhancing the quality of life in urban areas.

The contest, sponsored in part by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), was launched in Porto Alegre, Brazil, at the First World Conference on Development of Cities, held Feb. 13-16. Contest winners will be announced at the Fourth International Congress on Sustainable Transport in Mexico City in October.

Luis Gutiérrez, director for Latin America of the Center for Sustainable Transport (EMBARQ) of the World Resources Institute, said during the launch that the contest seeks to "promote city initiatives that improve mass transit and create public spaces that encourage physical activity and a sense of community." Such initiatives, he said, "confront our worst contemporary health problem: chronic diseases resulting from our current way of living in cities and which, according to WHO, are responsible for 65 percent of all deaths around the world."

"Cities should be designed for people, not just for cars and commerce," said Enrique Jacoby, PAHO regional advisor on healthy eating and healthy living, in Washington. "Cities where efficiency and progress go hand in hand with social harmony, quality of life and health – this is the model we want to build upon."

Entries in this year's contest will be judged in three categories: sustainable transport and environment; public spaces, safety and civic culture; and physical activity and recreation. The deadline for entries is June 13, and more information on eligibility and submission requirements is available at www.ciudadesactivas.org.

Past winners of the "Active Cities, Healthy Cities" contest have included:

- Belo Horizonte, Brazil's "City Streets" initiative, which promoted infrastructure improvements benefitting some 870,000 pedestrians.
- Pirapora, Brazil's city recycling and clean-up program, which improved the city's environment and helped to eliminate cases of dengue fever.
- Biciacción ("Bike Action") of Quito, Ecuador, for "Quito Moves with You," which reclaimed roadways for recreational uses.
- Recife, Brazil, for its "City Academy" program, which promotes physical activity in poorer neighborhoods where residents are at higher risk of cardiovascular disease.

Cities that encourage physical activity and provide healthy environments for their inhabitants can make a significant contribution to improving public health. According to PAHO estimates, three out of four urban residents are sedentary, increasing their risk for chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and obesity. With more than 70 percent of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean living in urban areas, this amounts to a significant public health problem.

To help prevent chronic diseases, PAHO and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week. Physical activity has also been shown to support mental health, by helping with stress management, increasing self-esteem, reducing depression, and improving mental agility.

Many initiatives that foster physical activity also promote sustainable transportation, which contributes to healthier environments.

The International "Active Cities, Healthy Cities" Contest was first launched in 2002. Other sponsors of this year's contest include the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Center for Sustainable Transport (EMBARQ) at the World Resources Institute, the Center for Sustainable Transport of Mexico, the Center for Sustainable Transport of Brazil, the AVINA Foundation, and the Humane City Foundation (Fundación Ciudad Humana).

Enlaces de interés:

- Third International "Active Cities, Healthy Cities" Contest (in Spanish and Portuguese)
- World Conference on Development of Cities: Democratic Innovation and Social Transformations for Inclusive Cities for the 21st Century

PAHO was established in 1902 and is the organization of older public health of the world. It is the Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization and works on with the countries in order to improve the health and improve the quality of life of its inhabitants.