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## International ecology group starts in city

**RON SEELY**  
**608-252-6131**

[rseely@madison.com](mailto:rseely@madison.com)

An international meeting in Madison of environmental health scientists has given birth to a new association that will likely play a key role in addressing such worldwide issues as avian flu, industrial agriculture and climate change-related diseases.

The new group is called The International Association for Ecology and Health.

Not only was it born in Madison, but the association's newly elected president is a UW- Madison scientist - Jonathan Patz, director of global environmental health for the Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment, or SAGE.

Such an organization, Patz said Monday, is perfectly situated to help people understand and make connections that might not otherwise be apparent - between changes in climate and disease, between the destruction of tropical forest and increases in mosquito- borne illnesses, between livestock farming and antibiotic resistance.

"Many of today's greatest threats to health," Patz said, "involve underlying and often insidious risks, be they from land use or climate change, to the unhealthy way we design our cities. . . . Now, here is an organization born right here in Madison that will have world- wide reach."

The environmental health conference, called EcoHealth One, drew researchers and physicians from around the world. It ended Monday.

Over the four-day conference, scientists presented the latest on a number of issues that will occupy the new association in coming years. At a press briefing Monday, several of the conference's main speakers discussed everything from a new disease in sheep that has been linked to climate change to the unfortunate connections between our taste for chicken and the destruction of the Brazilian rain forest.

From avian flu to increases in mosquito-borne diseases, so many environmental-related health problems are surfacing around the world that an association dedicated to understanding them is essential to meet the threats, organizers say.

For example, Willem Takken, a veterinary entomologist from Wageningen University in the Netherlands, reported on blue tongue disease, an illness that is fatal to sheep and is spread by sand flies.

Warming temperatures and subsequent increases in the populations of sand flies have caused a surprising spread of the disease into northern African countries where it had not been anticipated, Takken said.

"All the climate models predicted the disease would not move as far north," Takken said. "Everybody was taken by surprise."

Ellen K. Silbergeld, a professor at Johns Hopkins University in the department of environmental health sciences, told of an emerging problem in Brazil that has connections to our own dining room tables.

The latest and most severe threat to rain forests, she said, comes from soybeans. The forests are being cleared and soybeans grown to provide feed for chickens that are sold mostly to other countries, primarily the United States.

Patz's own work, in turn, has revealed an increase in mosquito-borne diseases in the Amazon because when the rain forests fall, more water collects on the bare ground, creating more places for the insects to breed.

"What we have to learn to do," Patz said, "is look at each of the health issues every time a dam is built or a road is cut through a forest."