

# News Release

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## **76 Million Could Perish From Water-Related Disease by 2020** **Death Toll From Global Water Crisis Could Exceed Deaths From AIDS**

**Oakland, California** – Over 76 million people will perish from water-related disease by 2020 unless urgent action is taken, according to a new report released today by the Pacific Institute of Oakland, California. The report finds that water-related diseases could claim more lives than the global AIDS pandemic by 2020 unless major changes are made.

“As many as 76 million people – mainly children – will die from preventable, water-related diseases by 2020 even if current United Nations goals are reached,” said Peter H. Gleick, President of the Pacific Institute.

The report, “Dirty Water: Estimated Deaths from Water-Related Diseases 2000-2020,” looks at three different scenarios and concludes that even if we achieve the United Nations Millennium Goals, which aim to cut the proportion of people without clean drinking water by half, 34 to 76 million people could perish over the next twenty years.

“Under the most optimistic scenario we examined, the death toll from water-related disease is still staggering,” continued Dr. Gleick, “and would exceed the projected deaths from the global AIDS epidemic. This largely hidden tragedy ranks as one of the greatest development failures of the 20th century.”

The causes of the global water crisis are many, but the Pacific Institute’s report points out that current development efforts, which focus on large, centralized water systems, are part of the problem.

“Far too much money has been spent on centralized, large-scale water systems that cannot be built or maintained with local expertise or resources, while traditional and community-scale systems have been inadequately funded and supported,” said Gleick. “It is time to change direction, toward a “soft path” that relies on smaller-scale systems designed, built, and operated by local groups. Outside assistance in terms of information, funding, and expertise is certainly still required, but this assistance must be provided in new and different ways.”

The current best estimates of water-related deaths fall between 2 and 5 million deaths per year. The vast majority of those dying from water-related disease are small children struck by virulent but preventable diarrhoeal diseases. The new report released by the Institute makes three model calculations of the total water-related deaths likely to occur between 2000 and 2020. The first assumes that water-related deaths continue to occur in direct proportion to global population. The second assumes that water-related deaths are more directly related to the population without access to adequate water services – a more realistic estimate – and that those numbers increase as global population increases. The third estimate assumes that the official United Nations Millennium targets for water services are reached in 2015 and efforts continue to 2020. Under this last, optimistic scenario, between 34 and 76 million people, mostly children, will still perish by 2020.

“The UN Millennium Goals are a step in the right direction,” Gleick said, “but they are inadequate in the face of the appalling death toll facing the poorest people in the poorest countries. International efforts must be coupled with specific and aggressive new commitments on the part of countries and development organizations.”

For more information on the soft path for water, and for the full report, please visit our Website:

[http://www.pacinst.org/reports/water\\_related\\_deaths.htm](http://www.pacinst.org/reports/water_related_deaths.htm)

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