



## Introduction to Environmental Health and Disaster Management

**Zagreb, Croatia – 23 through 27 March 2015**

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*James Williams, Bsc Env, MEHA, Aspen Medical Australia*

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International Federation of Environmental Health's Asia-Pacific Regional Group (IFEH) proudly delivered an Introduction to Environmental Health and Disaster Management course on 23 through 27 March 2015 in Zagreb, Croatia. This was the first of IFEH's disaster risk reduction initiative in Europe and a continuation of the global effort which began in 2012.

The course was delivered through a partnership between IFEH, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Environmental Health Association (USA), Croatian Chamber of Health Professionals and the Teaching Institute of Public Health "Dr. Andrija Stampar." There were 19 environmental health and disaster management professionals who participated from across Croatia.

The course had a particular focus on strategies for addressing environmental health issues before, during and after floods. A field trip to the recent Slavonian floods in northeastern Croatia provided a good example. This included sessions relating to drinking water, shelters, responder safety, food safety, wastewater, disease-causing vectors, solid waste, hazardous materials and disaster management systems. The role of environmental health in the responses to Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf Oil Spill and recent Asia-Pacific cyclones were also covered. As a new and emerging environmental health issue, James Williams provided a first-hand account on lessons learned from a recent deployment to Liberia. His lecture on environmental health and sanitation aspects of response to the Ebola Virus Disease was timely and pertinent to the overall goals of the course.

The course concluded with an exercise, which focused on the preparation and response activities to a flood threatening a nearby community. This allowed participants to identify what was to be undertaken when preparing for and responding to a local flood event. It also allowed participants to understand disaster response frameworks, challenges faced and tools for systematically addressing environmental health risks. The course evaluation found the content met all expectations. All participants indicated they would recommend the training to other professionals. On average the awareness level of environmental health risks associated with a disaster increased by 44%. Also, all participants indicated they would use the concepts covered in their disaster management activities.

The course could not have been successful the interaction of the participants. A special thank you goes to Bruno Cvetkovic and Danijel Brkic, Croatian Chamber of Environmental Health Professionals for helping organize the course.

The course was delivered by Tim Hatch (IFEH; ADPH), James Williams (Aspen Medical Australia), and numerous local health professionals who provided after action reports from the Slavonian area floods.

As part of continuing to implement its disaster risk reduction initiative, IFEH plans to work with CDC, NEHA, Griffith University and its partner organizations to deliver courses in Australia, Europe, Africa, Indonesia and New Zealand during 2015/16. For further information please visit [www.ifeh.org](http://www.ifeh.org).



**In partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USA**