



Introduction to Environmental Health and Disasters

Townsville, Australia – 24 - 29 August 2014

Ben Ryan, Director, Disaster Risk Reduction, Asia-Pacific, IFEH; Dr Peter Davey, Honorary Vice President, IFEH and Griffith University; and Tim Hatch, Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH); Director, Disaster Risk Reduction, Americas, IFEH

International Federation of Environmental Health's Asia-Pacific Regional Group (IFEH) proudly delivered an Introduction to Environmental Health and Disasters course on August 24 – 29, 2014 in Townsville, Australia at the Rydges Southbank. This was a continuation IFEH's disaster risk reduction initiative across the Asia-Pacific.

The course was delivered through a partnership between IFEH, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Environmental Health Association (NEH) USA, Environmental Health Australia (EHA) and the Townsville City Council. There were 27 environmental health and disaster management professionals who participated from across Australia.



EHD Class Photo August 2014 – Townsville, Australia

The course had a particular focus on strategies for addressing environmental health issues before, during and after a localized disaster. The 2011 Bundaberg floods provided a good example. This included sessions relating to drinking water, shelters, overcrowding, food safety, wastewater, disease-causing vectors, solid waste, hazardous materials and disaster management systems. Internationally, the role of environmental health in the responses to Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf Oil Spill and Cyclone's Larry and Yasi were also covered.

The course concluded with an exercise, which focused on the preparation and response activities related to a flooding scenario which was relevant to those in attendance. This allowed participants to identify what was to be undertaken when preparing for and responding to a local and wide spread flood damage. 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 11%. 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 Grant Steen (EHA), Gavin Hammond (Townsville City Council) and Margaret Hind (EHA) for helping organise the course.

The course was delivered by Tim Hatch (IFEH; ADPH), Angela Lawson (Townsville (Australia) City Council), Bob Handby (Australian red Cross (retired)), and Ben Ryan (Queensland Health).

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