

International Federation of Environmental Health



Policy Statement 11

International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH)

Policy Statement on Disaster Risk Reduction and Environmental Health

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I. Introduction

The International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) issues this policy statement to highlight the essential role of environmental health in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). As disasters grow in frequency and intensity due to climate change and other global pressures, the integration of environmental health expertise into DRR frameworks is critical to protecting public health, achieving sustainability, and building resilient communities.

This statement affirms IFEH's position and provides an actionable framework to strengthen the engagement of the environmental health workforce in DRR at global, national, regional, and local levels.

II. Background

Disasters—whether natural, technological, or human-induced—pose increasing public health risks. Events such as wildfires, floods, and extreme weather are exacerbated by rapid climate change and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 calls for a multi-sectoral, whole-of-society approach to resilience-building, where environmental health plays a critical, though often underrecognized, role.

Environmental health professionals are uniquely positioned to assess, prevent, and manage disaster-related health threats across diverse domains, including water and sanitation, food safety, air quality, vector control, waste management, risk communication, and community engagement.

IFEH's longstanding commitment to DRR includes:

- Formal partnership with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Science and Technology Partnership since 2016.
- Active participation in Global Platform Conferences.
- Contributions to the UNDRR-ISC Hazard Definition and Classification Review and Hazard Information Profiles.

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Key Data:

- Between 2000 and 2019, 7,348 major disasters were recorded, causing 1.23 million deaths, affecting 4.2 billion people, and resulting in US\$2.97 trillion in economic losses (UNDRR, 2020).
- These events disproportionately impact vulnerable populations and lead to long-term health consequences, including mental health disorders, infectious disease outbreaks, and disruption of health systems (WHO, 2021).

Global Examples:

- In the Philippines, local environmental health officers were instrumental in typhoon recovery through sanitation surveillance.
- In the UK, local authorities integrated EH into COVID-19 response planning, strengthening community-level preparedness.
- In Kenya, EH officers contributed to disaster education during drought response initiatives.

III. Position and Recommendations

IFEH affirms the critical importance of integrating DRR into environmental health practice and endorses the principles of the Sendai Framework. We call upon our member organizations, governments, academia, and communities to act decisively.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Integrate DRR into Environmental Health Education**
Embed DRR principles and competencies into all accredited environmental and public health education and training programs globally.
2. **Mobilize IFEH Member Organizations**
IFEH members are encouraged to formally adopt this policy, present it to national Ministers of Health, Environment, and DRR, and collaborate to embed environmental health roles within national DRR strategies.
3. **Strengthen National and Regional DRR Plans**
Establish or update DRR policies that explicitly involve environmental health professionals at all levels of governance.
4. **Enhance Workforce Capacity**
Develop and implement comprehensive training for the environmental and wider public health workforce, emphasizing risk assessment, emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and collaborative practice.

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5. **Advance Research and Innovation**

Foster partnerships between environmental health professionals and the broader scientific community to support interdisciplinary research and innovation in DRR.

6. **Mainstream Environmental Health in Disaster Management**

Ensure that environmental health is integrated into all phases of disaster management—from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery—through coordinated planning and service delivery.

7. **Establish Monitoring and Evaluation**

Encourage national authorities and IFEH members to develop indicators for tracking DRR integration within environmental health strategies, education, and workforce readiness.

IV. Supporting Rationale

Environmental health professionals possess core competencies essential for effective DRR, including:

- Preventive surveillance and monitoring
- Proactive risk assessment and risk communication
- Outbreak prevention and control
- Health education and health promotion
- Strategic stakeholder engagement and coordination
- Policy development and enforcement

These functions are indispensable in building disaster-ready health systems that protect individuals, families, and communities while advancing national resilience priorities.

Vulnerable Populations:

Disasters affect individuals unequally. DRR strategies must prioritize the voices and needs of marginalized and at-risk populations—including Indigenous communities, displaced persons, the elderly, and informal settlements.

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V. Calls to Action

For Policymakers:

- Integrate environmental health priorities into national and local DRR frameworks.
- Allocate sustained funding for the deployment and development of the environmental health workforce in disaster preparedness and response.

For Educational Institutions:

- Incorporate DRR content into curricula at all levels.
- Partner with governments and professional associations to offer applied learning opportunities in emergency management and community resilience.

For Environmental Health Professionals:

- Commit to ongoing professional development in DRR.
- Lead or contribute to multi-sectoral DRR collaborations that prioritize public health and equity.

For Local Government and Communities:

- Engage environmental health experts in local DRR planning.
- Participate in community-based initiatives that promote preparedness and resilience.
- Ensure inclusive participation of vulnerable groups in DRR planning processes.

VI. Implementation Toolkit (Annex I - Summary Guide for Practitioners)

Key Elements of DRR Integration for EH Officers:

- Conduct local hazard mapping linked to sanitation, water, and shelter risks.
- Ensure surveillance and early warning systems are functioning pre- and post-disaster.
- Engage community members through participatory risk communication.
- Include EH experts in Emergency Operations Centers and post-disaster reviews.
- Document lessons learned for policy feedback and adaptation.

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VII. Endorsement and Adoption

This policy is officially endorsed by the Board of Directors of the International Federation of Environmental Health. IFEH member organizations are encouraged to adopt this policy, align national advocacy and programming accordingly, and report on progress during future General Assembly sessions.

Together, we can build disaster-resilient systems that safeguard health, protect the environment, and uphold the dignity and well-being of communities worldwide.



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