



## Introduction to Environmental Health and Disaster Management

Townsville, Australia – 23 through 28 August 2015

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The International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) proudly delivered an Introduction to Environmental Health and Disaster Management course on 23 through 28 August 2015 in Townsville, Australia. The course was delivered through a partnership between IFEH, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Environmental Health Association (USA), Environmental Health Australia (Queensland) and Townsville City Council (TCC). There were 27 environmental health and disaster management professionals who participated from across Australia.

The course had a particular focus on strategies for addressing environmental health issues before, during and after floods. 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 the global Ebola crisis, the Gulf Oil Spill and recent Asia-Pacific cyclones were also covered. As a new and emerging environmental health issue, disaster risk reduction was a focus of the learning and a full explanation of SPHERE Standards, ICS, Cluster and UNISDR were covered.

A unique field trip was offered to the students as they were allowed to tour and experience a specialized evacuation shelter purpose built for the citizens of Townsville. This hardened facility is geographically located in a low risk area and provides a place of refuge for people living in areas of high risk during disasters. Planning and use procedures were discussed and the amenities of this building were demonstrated by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.

The course concluded with an exercise, which focused on the preparation and response activities to a cyclone triggered 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 20%. 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 Gavin Hammond, Melissa McKeown, and Angela Lawson as well as the Townsville City Council for helping organize the course. The course was delivered by Tim Hatch (IFEH; ADPH), Ben Ryan (IFEH, QLD AUS), and Bob Hanby (Australian Red Cross (Water and Sanitation)). There was participation and input from several international and local experts in environmental health and disaster management including one from New Zealand.



This was the third consecutive year IFEH partnered with EHA (QLD) and TCC to deliver this course. There are agreements in place to have this continue through 2018 as the premiere environmental health disaster training in Australia.

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 2016.

For further information please visit [www.ifeh.org](http://www.ifeh.org).



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