

Inaugural Environmental Health and Disaster Management Training Course

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On 27 and 28 October the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) delivered the inaugural Environmental Health and Disaster Management training course in Brisbane, Australia. The course was led by environmental health professionals and attracted 30 public health and disaster management students and specialists from Indonesia, China, Japan, Korea and Australia. It was a unique opportunity for IFEH to test a modified version of the successful Environmental Health Training in Emergency Response (EHTER) Course, run by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention across the USA, in the Asia-Pacific region.

The environmental health risks and mitigation strategies in a disaster setting were identified and discussed during the course. This included discussion around the key risks such as those relating to drinking water, shelters, overcrowding, food safety, wastewater, disease-causing vectors, solid waste and hazardous materials. Case studies from recent disasters in Australia and a cholera outbreak in Papua New Guinea were also presented and discussed.

The course included a tour of the Queensland (State) Disaster Coordination Centre. This was a unique opportunity for an insight into how the disaster management system in Queensland and Australia operates and supports responses locally, across the state, nationally and internationally. The tour included an overview of the impact of, and response to, recent flooding in southern Queensland and Cyclone Yasi (a category 5 system) in northern Queensland.

The course concluded with a group exercise, which focused on what actions public health and disaster management professionals need to take when preparing for and responding to a cyclone. This included an overview and discussion of possible disaster response strategies and tools that can mitigate environmental health risks in the disaster setting.

Feedback from participants found the course to be very successful with 97% indicating it met expectations. Also, the participants awareness level of the environmental health risks associated with a disaster increased on average by 25% for each participant. A very good outcome considering the content is designed to be delivered over four days.

The course was designed and delivered in a partnership between environmental health professionals, IFEH, CDC, the Alliance for Health Cities – Australian Chapter, Griffith University, Aspen Medical, AECOM, Emergency Management Queensland and the National Environmental Health Association (USA). The course could not have been successful without this partnership approach and the interaction of the participants.

Tour of Queensland
Disaster Coordination Centre



Group exercise



As part of continuing to build environmental health capacity globally, IFEH is now working with its partners to deliver four-day courses in Bali, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom during May 2013.

IFEH is willing to deliver the course anywhere globally. For further please contact Ben Ryan, Director Disaster Training, Asia-Pacific, IFEH, via e-mail benjamin.ryan@my.jcu.edu.au

