

Introduction to Environmental Health and Disaster Management

Townsville, Queensland, Australia – 20 through 25 August 2017

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and Bob Handby, Australian Red Cross (retired)*

For the fifth year in a row, the international course “An Introduction to Environmental Health and Disaster Management” was successfully delivered on August 20-25, 2017 in Townsville, Australia. The International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) proudly endorsed this disaster risk reduction initiative and marks a continuation of the global effort which began in 2012.

The course was delivered through a partnership between IFEH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Environmental Health Association (USA), Environmental Health Australia – Queensland and the Townsville City Council. There were 12 environmental health and disaster management professionals who participated from across Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

The course had a particular focus on strategies for addressing environmental health issues before, during and after floods. A field trip to the Townsville Cyclone Shelter 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, Dr. Peter Davey discussed climate change and how communicable diseases must be attended to as a critical need of citizens during and after disasters. His lecture on environmental health and disaster risk reduction 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 16%. 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 Townsville Council, EHA, Grant Steen, and Melissa McKeown for helping organise the course again this year. The course was delivered by Dr. Peter Davey (Griffith University), Tim Hatch (IFEH; Alabama Department of Public Health (USA)), Bob Handby (Australian Red Cross (retired)), and numerous local health professionals and emergency managers who provided pertinent and timely real life examples of disaster response, practice and systems across Australia. As part of continuing to implement its disaster risk reduction initiative, IFEH plans to work with CDC, NEHA, Griffith University and its other partner organizations to continue to deliver more courses in Australia, Europe, the Pacific Islands, Africa, Indonesia and New Zealand in the coming months. For further information please visit www.ifeh.org/ehdm.



2017 EHDM Class Participants in Townsville