



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



CONCEPT DOCUMENT

WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DAY 2024

1. PURPOSE

26 September 2024 marks the 13th World Environmental Health Day (WEHD) since its launch by the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH), with a proclamation at its September Council Meeting in Bali, Indonesia. The South African Environmental Health fraternity has celebrated this day annually since 2012, with the first commemoration held in Queenstown in the Eastern Cape.

This day highlights the continuing threats of environmental risk factors to population health outcomes, and the urgent need to address them.

Equally important the day is dedicated to recognising the dedication and hard work of environmental health workers, stakeholders and educators around the world, and their efforts in making a difference towards addressing upstream social determinants to contribute to a long and healthy life.

2. BACKGROUND

Environmental health addresses all the physical, chemical, and biological factors external to a person, and all the related factors impacting behaviours. It encompasses the assessment and control of those environmental factors that can potentially impact human health. It is targeted towards preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments.

Environmental health is an integral component of the primary healthcare services and is key in complementing other health disciplines towards strengthening the health system.

The World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that 13.7 million of deaths per year in 2016, that amounted to 24 per cent of the global deaths, were due to modifiable environmental risks. This means that almost one in four of total global deaths were linked to environmental conditions.



The effects of climate change are more visible, frequent and intense. Natural disasters, biodiversity loss and pollution are all disproportionately affecting the people who are least capable of protecting themselves. According to the WHO, climate change is impacting human lives and health in a variety of ways. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250 000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress alone. Non-communicable diseases, including ischaemic heart disease, chronic respiratory diseases and cancers are the most frequent disease outcomes caused. Injuries, respiratory infections and stroke follow closely. Globally, 23 per cent of all deaths could be prevented through healthier environments – and scaled-up action is required.

Environmental health must address the societal and environmental factors that increase the likelihood of exposure to disease posed by exposure to pollution, to hazardous substances in the air, water, soil, and food, natural and technological disasters, climate change, occupational hazards, the built environment and other environmental factors. Sectoral actions to create healthier environments, including in priority settings such as workplaces, cities, dwellings, healthcare facilities, and emergency settings should be in a list of priority interventions.

These interventions should be supported by scientific and applied research, to inform evidence-base, decision making and policy direction. This research should be aimed at developing appropriate technologies and methodologies to assist the development of management strategies to identify and propose mitigation of emerging hazards.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE EVENT

The key objectives of WEHD 2024 event are to:

- provide a platform for Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) and other key stakeholders to share scientific and operational research with the objective of strengthening evidence-based interventions
- identify gaps in implementation and context specific areas of good practice and share lessons learnt
- influence future policy actions and decisions to promote successful coordination towards the creation of resilient communities
- draw lessons from national and where possible international experiences in environmental health services approaches
- position environmental health services as fundamental to addressing the social determinants of health and in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, drawing lessons from recent regional and national outbreaks

The main objective of activities at community level is to raise awareness to the public on environmental health services as key in disease prevention of diseases and promotion of public health.

4. THEME

The theme for WEHD 2024 is ***“Environmental Health: Creating resilient communities through disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation”***, as adopted by the International Federation of Environmental Health. The theme focuses on climate change and disaster risks that are fundamental threats to sustainable development, the living and health conditions for all humans in the globe and exacerbation of poverty. The negative impacts threaten to reverse decades of development gains. Building resilient and sustainable communities means addressing both climate change and disaster risks, integrating these risks, and potential opportunities, into development planning and budgeting. Furthermore, the theme is centered on the understanding and acknowledging the upstream health determinants caused by environmental conditions where people are born, eat, live, and grow.

5. COMMEMORATION OF WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DAY 2024

The national Department of Health in collaboration with the Alfred Nzo District Municipality and the Eastern Cape Department of Health, will hold a two day conference on 25 to 26 September 2024 in the Eastern Cape.

5.1 Target audience

Approximately 350 to 400 delegates are expected to attend the event. The delegates will be drawn from the environmental health fraternity, i.e. environmental health officials from all the three spheres of government, political leaders, relevant government entities, including other identified key stakeholders such as South African Local Government Association (SALGA), other sector departments, institutions of higher learning, research institutions, amongst others.

5.2 Programme outline

The event will comprise of a technical session (plenary and breakaway sessions). The opening and closing will be plenary fora, with the bulk of the conference programme consisting of breakaway commissions and report-back sessions.

The event will also provide an opportunity for provincial, district and metropolitan municipalities to display poster presentations to showcase their successes in the various areas in service delivery. Programme space will also be provided for presentations and input from organisations in other sectors on innovative approaches that can add value to environmental health interventions through collaboration and cooperation.

Day 1: 25 September 2024

- Opening
- Breakaway sessions - Presentations on research topics grouped in thematic areas.

The thematic areas are as follows:

Thematic areas	Focus topics
Climate change and disaster management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management of environmental health impacts of natural disasters e.g. climate events such as floods, elevated temperatures, etc.• Management of environmental health impacts of man-made disasters e.g. civil unrest, chemical explosion or spillages, burning of informal settlement, etc.• Multi-hazard disaster risk management.• Environmental management strategies in healthcare.• Waste management.• Any other related studies.
Environmental health in disease control	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management of environmentally induced communicable diseases e.g. waterborne diseases, foodborne diseases, etc.• Management of environmentally induced non-communicable diseases e.g. lead poisoning, mercury poisoning, pesticides poisoning, etc.• Emerging and re-emerging diseases.• Disease prevention, preparedness, prevention, surveillance and response.• Strengthening prevention, preparedness and response in environmental health.• The effects/ impact of migration in relation to disease control.• Any other related studies.

Thematic areas	Focus topics
Environmental health systems and institutional capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental health staffing. • Environmental health financing. • Environmental health regulatory framework efficiency and enforcement capacity. • Efficiency of environmental health operations. • Enforcement of environmental health laws. • Efficiency of environmental health policies. • Strengthening innovation and technology use. • Use of data or information to enhance environmental health. • Environmental health within primary healthcare. • Any other related studies.
Environmental health pollution control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste/land pollution control. • Air pollution control. • Noise pollution control. • Water pollution control. • Health impact assessment and risk assessment of development projects, plans and programmes. • Any other related studies.

Evening session for Day 1 (25 September will include a Gala dinner)

- Gala dinner

Day 2: 26 September 2024

Morning session – Plenary - Political session:

- Addresses by identified political leaders, including the Minister of Health, MEC for Health: Eastern Cape, Mayor of Alfred Nzo District Municipality.
- Messages of support by key stakeholders, such as International Federation for Environmental Health (IFEH), the World Health Organization (WHO), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

Afternoon session – Plenary:

- Report backs from breakaways on key research recommendations.
- Closing session.

Both days

- Voluntary health screenings; and
- Exhibitions by environmental health related stakeholders.

6. OTHER COMMEMORATION RELATED ACTIVITIES

6.1 Build up activities

September is dedicated as Environmental Health Month, provinces and their municipalities, are urged to engage in various build up activities aligned to 2024 WEHD theme, within the communities and areas of operations to raise awareness on environmental health as a profession and service. Provinces are requested to ensure that build up activities incorporate activities conducted at the points of entry from Border Management Authority (BMA) officials, within their respective provinces.

Contributions of the institutions of higher learning and their students should also be acknowledged and appreciated during this time. Therefore, provinces are encouraged to liaise with institutions of higher learning and other stakeholders rendering Environmental health services within their various provinces to ensure that provincial plans also consolidate activities that will be undertaken by these stakeholders.

Provincial plans for the commemoration of “World Environmental Health Day 2024” will be consolidated into a national plan that can be communicated nationwide and experiences shared during the main event.

6.2 Provincial planning and reporting

Provinces and their municipalities in collaboration with identified stakeholders are urged to jointly plan all build up activities to be undertaken in September and to mark World Environmental Health Day on 26 September 2024. Provinces should coordinate all plans from the municipalities to develop provincial plans and submit to the national Department of Health for consolidation of a national plan for noting in the national event.

6.1.1 Proposed community-based activities

Various activities can be undertaken at a community level to raise awareness on environmental health, including but not limited to the following:

- Community outreach education drives: Community campaigns and education on environmental health, including in public gathering spaces, using information, education and communication material.
- School competitions and school talks: Launch of poster competitions in schools on various environmental health topics or target school assemblies to promote environmental health awareness topics.
- Blitz activities: Targeting taxi ranks, churches and shopping malls to educate and distribute information.
- Door-to-door education campaigns: For hard to reach, and sparsely populated areas such as farming areas, to educate and distribute information on environmental health.
- Career guidance activities: EHPs targeting grade 11 and 12 learners to promote environmental health as a career of choice.
- Clean up campaigns: Arranging for clean-ups of areas and promoting the re-use, recycle and recovery of waste material.
- Inspection blitz activities: Such as, mass inspections of food premises, funeral undertakers' premises, schools etc.

6.1.2 Key campaign messages

- “A clean environment is a healthy environment”
- “Save earth today to survive tomorrow”
- “Prevention is better than cure”
- “Preparedness and response are critical”
- “Break the cycle of disease”
- “Good hygiene practices stop the spread of disease”
- “Climate change is an environmental challenge”.

6.1.3 Information, education and communication strategy

The following mediums can be utilised to raise the profile of environmental health in the communities:

- **Social Media:**

Use of **social media networks**, such as WhatsApp, Facebook etc, to distribute messages. This can be done through Communication units within own departments or organisations.

- **Use of printed material:**

Environmental health related IEC material could be distributed to schools, businesses and community gathering centers i.e. posters, pamphlets. Distribution fact sheets on environmental health and engaging communities and answering possible questions is encouraged.

- **The use of mass media:**

Radio: The use of regional/community radio to flight messages, radio public service announcements (PSAs), radio health education programmes (requests of slot with local stations to interview EHPs on environmental health).

TV: PSAs and adverts.

Newspaper: Placement of newspaper articles and media statements, etc. This could be achieved through Communication units.

7. FUNDING

Funding for the event will be sourced from the departmental budget with support from the hosting municipality and province.

8. KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Environmental health functions are fragmented between various government departments in the country, therefore cooperation and collaboration with various stakeholders is key in achieving policy objectives and positive health outcomes.

Stakeholders such as those mentioned below should be engaged during the commemoration to ensure continued collaboration and synergies in service delivery at all levels.

- Department of Health programmes such as Health Promotion, Communicable Disease Control, Nutrition, Communications, ITC.
- Department of Basic Education, Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and the Environment, among others.
- Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).
- South African Local Government Association (SALGA).
- World Health Organization (WHO).
- Institutions of Higher Learning and other research institutions.
- NGOs working on Environmental Health.
- Border Management Authority.

9. EVENT EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- **Research publications:** Recommendations for publication of environmental health journals.
- **Best Practices Guide:** A comprehensive guide detailing identified gaps, context-specific good practices, and lessons learned, may be used by practitioners and policymakers.
- **Policy recommendations:** A set of policy recommendations aimed at improving environmental health.
- **Case studies:** Documentation of national studies in environmental health services, highlighting successful approaches and strategies.
- **Training programmes:** Guidance for development of training modules and workshops based on the lessons learned from the studies presented.
- **Networking opportunities:** Establishment of networks and partnerships among Environmental Health Practitioners, researchers, and stakeholders to foster ongoing collaboration and knowledge sharing.

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