



Public health planning and environmental health

Emergency management

Local government environmental health professionals are responsible for monitoring and managing risks related to water quality, sanitation, food safety, waste management (regional), vector control and hazardous materials. Following a disaster, e.g. bushfire, flooding or a cyclone, environmental health professionals play a critical role in the response and recovery phases of emergency management.

Environmental health risks should be considered during all phases of emergency management: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Under the [Emergency Management Act 2005](#) local governments are required to have local emergency management arrangements (LEMA) in place. LEMA is the collection of all emergency management strategies, plans, agreements and other documents that apply to the local government district. In an emergency, any of this information can be used, depending on the circumstances. Local governments are responsible for developing, maintaining, and testing their LEMA.

By integrating environmental health into the LEMA, local governments can effectively mitigate environmental health risks, enhance resilience, and promote rapid recovery.

Example strategies that could be implemented are included in the table below:

Examples
Develop an environmental health subplan to include within the Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA).
Review LEMA to identify gaps and where environmental health risk management should be considered.
Identify vulnerable populations within the local government that may require additional environmental health support e.g. remote aboriginal communities.
Ensure environmental health participation in broader emergency management exercises run by the local government and/or other agencies, including heatwaves.



Figure 1: Four phases of emergency management (Source: [State Emergency Management Committee](#)).

Examples

Ensure environmental health representation on the Local Emergency Management Committee.
Undertake a risk assessment of natural disasters and emergency incidents that may occur in a local district (e.g. flood, fire, cyclone, transport incidents) and identify the applicable environmental health related hazards, and management strategies (e.g. high risk of asbestos contamination, mosquito breeding, on-site wastewater impacted areas).
Assess facilities that have been identified as evacuation centres within local government area and undertake regular inspections of these facilities to ensure suitability.
Locate and assess the capacity and types of water supply and wastewater management systems at evacuation centres at the preparedness stage and include these within the LEMA.
Develop relevant templates to support environmental health response to emergencies including notices, damage assessments, contact lists etc.
Undertake annual exercises with environmental health workforce to support preparedness.
Identify the equipment and resources necessary for the EH team and ensure they are readily available.
Establish an agreement with neighbouring local governments regarding the sharing of environmental health resources (e.g. personnel) to ensure sufficient support during disaster events.
Educate local government and other emergency management agencies on the role of environmental health in emergency management.
Ensure the environmental health team have detailed and documented knowledge of the local area and potential risks to public health.
Implement disaster response workshops for community to increase community resilience and preparedness for local natural disasters.

Supporting resources

- [Environmental health risks during and after a bushfire](#)
- [Environmental health risks following cyclones and floods](#)
- [enHealth Disaster and Emergency Management for Environmental Health Practitioners](#)
- [Local Emergency Management Arrangements](#)
- [Safety and first aid](#)

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