



COMMEMORATION OF WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DAY 2018

CONCEPT DOCUMENT

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization (WHO) perceives Environmental Health as addressing all physical, chemical and biological factors impacting external to a person and other related factors impacting behaviours. It involves the assessment and control of those factors with the potential to affect human health, in order to minimize, correct and prevent these factors, prevent disease outbreaks and create health supportive environments.

According to WHO 2006 report on “Preventing Disease Through Healthy Environments: Towards an Estimate of the Environmental Burden of Disease”, South Africa is reported to have high level of environmental burden of disease with 16% of all deaths in the country estimated to be related to the state of the environment.

The International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) also recognizes the continuing threats of environmental risk factors to human health and the urgent need to adopt a preventative approach in improving the quality of the natural environment and reducing environmental disease impact on the health of the population. As a result, in September 2011, the IFEH at its Council meeting in Bali, Indonesia, deemed it necessary to promote the improvement of environmental parameters and Environmental Health Services by declaring 26 September to be World Environmental Health Day (WEHD).

WEHD is dedicated to the celebration and promotion of Environmental Health Services and to observe environmental health risk factors that communities are exposed to. This day is also dedicated to the recognition of the hard work and dedication of Environmental Health Professionals and authorities, despite the challenges experienced in their daily duties.

Since its launch, WEHD has been celebrated annually by Environmental Health Professionals, educators and students around the world. The National Department of Health has also actively played a leading role in coordinating national activities in commemoration of this day in the previous years.

The commemoration of WEHD has provided an opportunity for the National Department of Health to:

- Engage with the environmental health fraternity in the country with the aim to share information and discuss on issues of common interest.
- Honour the memory of the late Alfred Nzo, a ‘Health Inspector’ in Alexander, who’s experiences of poor living conditions of people in the Alexander township, forged much of the understanding of the lives of millions of South Africans in the 1950s.

- Recognize and present Alfred Nzo Environmental Health Excellence Awards to deserving Environmental Health Practitioners, Municipalities, Points of Entry and Environmental Health Students.
- Share current developments, research findings and capacity building for Environmental Health fraternity.

This year marks the 7th WEHD commemoration for South Africa.

2. THEME

The international theme for *WEHD 2018* is “**Global Food Safety and Sustainability**”.

The theme aims to support the provision of more safe food, to make use of precious water and nutrient resources and for communities to increasingly value sustainable food production. However, this should be done safely to maximize public health gains and environmental benefits.

The theme forces the consideration of balance between safe food and sustainable production. The impact of food production on the environment and its links to climate change are bound to be considered.

Food safety is being challenged nowadays by global dimensions of food supply chains, the need for reduction of food waste and efficient use of natural resources such as clean water. Food safety deals with safeguarding the own national food supply chain from the introduction, growth or survival of hazardous microbial and chemical agents. However, within a larger international context, borders are fading and surely this is that case for foodstuffs which are an important globally traded commodity.

Foodborne diseases are a growing public health problem throughout the world and causes a considerable burden of disability and mortality, World Health Organization (WHO) studies of the global burden of foodborne diseases in 2010 estimated that 31 hazards (including viruses, bacteria, protozoa, helminths and chemicals) caused 600 million foodborne illnesses globally and 420, 000 deaths (WHO 2015). An estimated 600 million almost 1 in 10 people in the world, fall ill after eating contaminated food. Children under 5 years of age carry 40% of foodborne disease burden, with 125, 000 deaths every year.

Foodborne diseases comprise a wide spectrum of illnesses that result from ingestion of foodstuffs contaminated with microorganisms or chemicals. Food may become contaminated at any stage in the process from production to consumption and contamination may be the result of environmental contamination such as pollution of water, soil or air.

The disease also impedes socio economic development by straining health care system and harming national economies, tourism and trade. Food and Agriculture Organization (FOA) estimates that each year, approximately one-third of all food produced for human consumption in the world is a lost or wasted. This food wastage represents a missed opportunity to improve global food security and the use of resources from food chains but also to mitigate environmental impacts. Wastage happens at all steps of production, handling, storage, processing, distribution and consumption. Agricultural production being responsible for the greatest amount of total wastage volume, with 33 % of the total.

It is also a critical component for the sustainable development. Safer food contributes to less illness, hence increased productivity and improved livelihood. Safe food, conforming to international food safety standards, contributes to increased export which lead to increased income. Furthermore, food safety is critical to human nutrition and food security. Poor nutrition and foodborne diseases often combine to a

vicious cycle of worsening health therefore, food safety must be systematically integrated into policies and interventions to improve nutrition and food security.

Foodborne disease takes a major toll on health. Thousands of millions of people fall ill and many die as a result of eating unsafe or contaminated food. Deeply concerned by this, the Fifty-third (53) World Health Assembly (WHA) May, 2000 adopted a resolution calling upon the World Health Organization (WHO) and its Members State to recognize food safety as an essential public health function. The resolution WHA 53.15 also called on WHO to develop a Global Strategy for reducing the burden of foodborne disease on health systems. The resolution further urges Members States to:

- Integrate food safety as a one of their essential public health and public nutrition functions and to provide adequate resources to establish and strengthen food safety programmes in close collaboration with the applied nutrition and epidemiological surveillance programmes;
- Design and implement systematic and sustainable preventive measures aimed at reducing significantly the occurrence of foodborne illnesses;
- Develop and maintain national, and where appropriate, regional means for surveillance of foodborne diseases and for monitoring and controlling relevant microorganisms and chemicals in food; to reinforce the principal responsibility of producers, manufacturers, and traders for food safety; and to increase the capacity of laboratories, especially in developing countries; to integrate measures in their food safety policies aimed at preventing the development of microbial agents that are resistant to antibiotics;
- Support the development of science in the assessment of risks related to food, including the analysis of risk factors relevant to foodborne disease;
- Integrate food safety matters into health and nutrition education and information programmes for consumers, particularly within primary and secondary school curricula, and to initiate culture-specific health and nutrition education programmes for food handlers, consumers, farmers, producers and agro-food industry personnel;
- Develop outreach programmes for the private sector that can improve food safety at the consumer level, with emphasis on hazard prevention and orientation for good manufacturing practices, especially in urban food markets, taking into account the specific needs and characteristics of micro- and small-food industries, and to explore opportunities for cooperation with the food industry and consumer associations in order to raise awareness regarding the use of good and ecologically safe farming and good hygienic and manufacturing practices;
- Coordinate the food safety activities of all relevant national sectors concerned with food safety matters, particularly those related to the risk assessment of foodborne hazards, including the influence of packaging, storage, handling and transportation.
- Participate actively in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its committees, including activities in the emerging area of food-safety risk analysis;
- Ensure appropriate, full and accurate disclosure in labelling of food products, including warnings and best-before dates where relevant;
- Legislate for control of the reuse of containers for food products and for the prohibition of false claims;

- Legislate the compulsory declaration of hazardous situations identified during food sampling analysis by all stakeholders including the food industry.

One of the strategic goals of the National Department of Health is to prevent disease and reduce its burden and promote health. Environmental health has surveillance measures to promote food safety and interventions to prevent, detect and respond to foodborne diseases. These interventions have a direct impact on supporting the Department in achieving this strategic goal as a reduction of foodborne diseases leads to a reduction in the burden of disease from illnesses linked to food.

With the current outbreak of Listeriosis that the country is currently facing, it is therefore essential to review current measures and develop strategic interventions to strengthen food security and food safety systems in the country. This can be achieved through effective sectoral coordination and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The country has taken measures to strengthen its food safety systems and all stakeholders are working jointly in addressing the outbreak.

In view of the above background, the South African National Department of Health supports the 2018 World Environmental Health Day theme.

3. VENUE AND EVENT DATES

The commemoration event will be held on 26 and 27 September 2018. at the President Hotel, in Bloemfontein, Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, Free State Province.

4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of World Environmental Health Day commemoration for 2018 are:

- To strengthen efforts and cooperation to address food safety as outlined in the WHO's Resolution WHA53.15 on food safety.
- To capacitate Environmental Health Practitioners on the execution of their functions related to food safety.
- To analyze existing food legislation and highlight possible gaps in implementation.
- To strengthen food outbreak prevention, preparedness and response systems, reflecting on the recent Listeriosis outbreak.
- To recognize hard work and dedication in environmental health service through presentation of Alfred Nzo Environmental Health Excellence Awards.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It is expected that the commemoration will result in the following:

- Increased knowledge and understanding on the roles and responsibilities of environmental health in food safety.
- Development of a roadmap towards strengthening food safety legislation in the country.
- Strengthened food outbreak prevention, preparedness and response systems.
- Improved intergovernmental governmental cooperation on food safety.

6. PARTICIPATION

Approximately 400 delegates from the Environmental Health fraternity, which includes Environmental Health Practitioners from National, Provincial, District and Metropolitan Municipalities, Educators and Students from Institutions of Higher Learning, other Government Departments, relevant NGOs and other interested parties are expected to attend a two-day conference.

The undertaking of local activities by Provincial Departments of Health and Municipalities, in conjunction with relevant interested parties is encouraged in the build up to the main two-day conference event.

7. EVENT ACTIVITIES

Activities for the main conference event are structured for two days and are as follows:

Day 1 and 2 Conference Activities

Day 1 Morning Session: Political session

It is expected that the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi will provide the key note address. The provincial Member of Executive Committee, Executive Mayors, Councilors, Non-Governmental organizations, stakeholders and officials are expected to support the event.

Speakers for the day include:

- Messages of support by key stakeholders identified;
- Message by the MEC;
- Key note address by the Minister of Health, Dr A Motsoaledi; and
- Presentations by key experts on overview of Environmental Health in Free State Province, the status of rendering Environmental Health Services, WHO's perspective on Global Food Safety and Sustainability and other critical technical presentations aligned to the theme.

Day 1: Technical session

Issues on Environmental Health Services when coming to food safety and sustainability will be discussed in detail. The conference will comprise of plenary where issues of common interest will be shared with all delegates and thereafter smaller workable groups will deliberate on specific issues allowing for more participation from delegates. The department has reduced the number of topics but has allowed more time for discussion and engagement on the following topics:

Topic One: Analysis of Food Control Legislation in the Country

The responsibility for food control in the country is shared between different departments or agencies. The roles and responsibilities of these departments or agencies may be quite different and duplication of regulatory activity, fragmented surveillance and a lack of coordination are common. There may also be wide variations in expertise and resources between the different agencies, and the responsibility for protecting public health may conflict with obligations to facilitate trade or develop an industry or sector.

The present situation challenges the government departments responsible for food controls to manage risks consistently across different types of establishments and different foods. It also creates situations in which foods of similar risks are inspected at different frequencies and/or in different ways. Furthermore,

this results in overlaps and gaps, breakdown of the chain of command, lack of effective coordination and inefficient use of resources.

There is also a need for setting of national norms and standards for food control in the country with the aim of ensuring uniformity and providing environmental health framework for rendering effective food control/food safety monitoring functions in the country

It is expected that gaps within the exiting food control legislation and challenges during the implementation process will be highlighted during deliberations. In addition, that roles and responsibilities for various stakeholders in food control will be clarified and way forward be proposed on the improvement in the legislation. The discussions should yield a way forward towards the reviewing of food control legislation in the country (Integrated approach). The team is also expected to develop a framework for food control norms and standards, taking into consideration relevant aspects related to food safety.

Topic Two: Strengthening Foodborne Disease Outbreak Prevention, Preparedness and Response Systems

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) play a preventative role to ensure that foodborne diseases outbreak do not occur. These roles include routine monitoring of foodstuffs and food premises which includes inspections and sampling activities, health education to food processors, handlers and consumers, especially within the informal sector. In addition, controlling of imported foodstuffs to ensure compliance with South African legislations.

The investigation and control of foodborne disease outbreak is a multi-disciplinary task requiring skills in the areas of clinical medicine, epidemiology, laboratory services, food and environmental sampling, interpretation of laboratory results, food microbiology and chemistry, food safety and food control, risk communication and management. When an outbreak occurs, all individuals involved in the investigation must clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and also the course of action. During the outbreak investigation process there may be some crossover of responsibilities between the public health units. Each of the key players in an outbreak investigation has the crucial responsibility of following procedures and to be ethical. All units often work simultaneously during an investigation collecting and sharing information to identify, investigate, control and prevent the continuance of an outbreak. It is essential that all units achieve a high level of communication and work as a team to successfully manage an outbreak.

It is expected that roles and responsibilities of various key role players in a foodborne disease outbreak investigation is clarified and gaps identify any challenges drawing from experiences of other outbreaks to enable evaluation the current reporting system. Identify the approach or a way forward on how to address the challenges.

Day 1: Evening session

Alfred Nzo awards will be held in the evening to award the best in each category to deserving Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs), Municipalities and Points of Entry for their outstanding contributions, dedication and hard work in promoting and strengthening Environmental Health Services in the country. Municipal awards will be based on their progressive performance during the follow up audits of the Municipalities who performed below the acceptable level in the baseline audit with regard to the implementation of the Environmental Health Norms and Standards. Points of Entry will be awarded based on their performance during audits with regard to the implementation for International Health Regulations (2005). This will also include Environmental Health students in the Institutions of Higher Learning.

Day 2: Technical Session

The delegates will gather at the plenary where a discussion topic will be presented and thereafter they will be divided into two smaller workable groups and deliberate on specific on the topic.

Discussion topic: Environmental Health Status in the Country

Environmental Health Services is currently rendered at three (3) levels of government National, Provincial and Municipal. Environmental Health Services Delivery in South Africa follows the enactment of the National Health Act, 2003, (Act 61 of 2003) as amended which led to the devolution and integration of Municipal Health Services (MHS) to Metropolitan and District Municipalities. The enactment also includes the transfer of Port Health Services from the Provincial Departments of Health to the National Department of Health.

The Minister of Health has on numerous occasions, highlighted concerns about the diminishing role of Environmental Health Services in the country, and during a Departmental strategic session held on 14 to 15 January 2016, he raised concerns particularly on the non-visibility of Environmental Health Practitioners, previously known as Health Inspectors. Overall, he was not convinced of the effective provision of these Health Services at the Municipal level.

The Chief Director: Environmental Health and Port Health Services was therefore tasked to review the status of environmental health services in the country. A Consultative workshop in this regards was held with EH Managers throughout the country. A report was drafted to that effect and submitted to the Minister for consideration.

The Minister further expressed in his speech during the Listeriosis outbreak that Environmental Health Service is a health function and is not receiving the required priority where is currently place. It was also revealed during an outbreak that EHP's are not receiving enough funding to render services e.g. funding for sampling. Subsequent to that, he requested parliament to support him with the consideration of relocating the service.

Several concerns have also been raised during the Environmental Health Norms and Standards audit in Municipalities where EHPs are requesting the relocation of the service due to the service not being prioritized in some municipalities. As a results, the National Department of Health would like to use the WEHD 2018 as an opportunity to extend the consultative process to review the status of Environmental Health in the country.

The team is expected to deliberate on the decision to transfer the service and develop strategies on how best the transfer of Municipal Health Service from Municipal Level to Provincial Level can be conducted.

8. Other activities in the conference will include:

- Exhibitions of new developments in the field of Environmental Health by various stakeholders.

9. PROPOSED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The proposed communication strategy with various mediums to be used for marketing and communicating the event to the general public will be drafted by communications officials from all levels of government.

PROPOSED KEY MESSAGES

- Five keys to safer food.
- Proper food handling is the key to foodborne disease prevention.
- Safer food is a basic human necessity.
- Unsafe food cannot sustain human health and can impose significant social and economic impact.
- An integrated approach on food safety is required to achieve health and development goals.

10. PROPOSED STAKEHOLDERS

Key stakeholders identified include:

- Department of Health (Health Promotion Directorate, Communications Directorate, Food Control, Nutrition, Support Services Directorate, Information Technology Directorate and International Health Relations Directorate);
- Provincial Health Departments;
- Municipal Health Services Departments;
- Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fishery (DAFF);
- Department of Trade and Industry (DIT);
- Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA);
- Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA);
- South African Local Government Association (SALGA);
- Environmental Health NGOs (South African Institute of Environmental Health (SAIEH) and National Association of Environmental Health in the Country (NAESA));
- National Consumer Commission (NCC);
- World Health Organisation (WHO);
- Medical Research Council (MRC);
- National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS); and
- Institutions of Higher Learning offering Environmental Health.

11. PROPOSED ROLES OF STAKEHOLDERS IN PREPARATION FOR THE EVENT

- Support of WEHD through undertaking various awareness raising activities;
- Collaborate with the Department in addressing food safety initiatives and sustainability;
- Provide technical support where needed;
- Share knowledge in the area of expertise with all interested and affected parties; and
- Advocate for improvement and monitoring of Environmental Health Services rendering and promotion.

12. PROPOSED BUILD-UP ACTIVITIES

Provinces and their Municipalities are urged and encouraged to undertake activities within their communities in support of 2018 WEHD. These activities will be building up to the national commemoration activities.

In undertaking local activities, collaboration with relevant stakeholders such as the Institutions of Higher Learning, Provincial SALGA, DBE, Municipal Police, NGOs, etc is encouraged.

Activities to raise awareness on Global Food Safety and Sustainability and other critical environmental risk factors within the province and municipalities may include, but not limited to the following:

ACTIVITY	TARGET GROUP/AREA/MEDIA
Community outreach awareness and education on Food Safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schools; crèches; places of care; health care facilities; public transport terminals; shopping centres and general community public places.
Competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School poster, drama, poem, debate and essay competitions.
Inspection blitz activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Industrial premises, schools; crèches; places of care; health care facilities; formal food premises; office accommodation and accommodation establishments.
Career guidance activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targeting grade 11 and 12 learners in high schools and primary schools to promote Environmental Health as a subject and a career of choice.
Exhibitions with relevant interest parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shopping centres; ▪ Public transport terminals; and ▪ Provincial/District/Municipal/Regional Offices reception areas.
Provincial/District/Municipal/Regional workshops, including workshop on the Food Safety management plan and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environmental Health Practitioners, other Municipal officials, industries, general public
Media outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Posters, flyers, leaflets development and distribution; ▪ Local newspaper articles; ▪ Articles on internal departmental newsletters; ▪ Local radio interviews; and ▪ Social media e.g. twitter, Facebook, etc.