



CONCEPT DOCUMENT

WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DAY

2023

1. Purpose

The 26th September 2023 marks the 12th 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 by since 2012, with the 1st commemoration held in Queenstown in the Eastern Cape Province.

WEHD is dedicated to the recognition of the continuing threats of environmental risk factors to human health and the urgent need to address the determinants of health that impact negatively on the health of the population. In addition, the dedication and hardwork of Environmental Health Practitioners, educators and other cadres in this space are acknowledged and commended, amidst various system challenges.

2. Background

Environmental health is a discipline that comprises those aspects of human health, including quality of life that are determined by physical, chemical, biological, social and psychosocial factors in the environment. It is one of the largest fields within public health because of the myriad ways external forces can impact how people eat, live, and grow. These forces can be about addressing our natural environment (as in the case for clean water or sanitation), but they can also be the consequence of human beings' actions. The World Health Organisation (WHO) continues to highlight the significant poor health outcomes as a result of environmental issues, which account for more than 12.6 million deaths each year. Often, these issues have the greatest impact on communities that are poor and already have significant health care vulnerabilities.

Report by Verywell Health (2020) indicates that more than 780 million people don't have access to clean drinking water worldwide and as a result, more than 2,200 children die due to diseases caused by poor water quality each day. Harmful microbes, which are more commonly called pathogens or germs, can infect humans and cause illness. Eating is one of the primary ways in which humans can contract diseases caused by microbes.

Global Environmental Public Health – standing up to protect everyone's health each and every day.

At least 155 states recognize their citizens have the right to live in a healthy environment, either through national legislation or international accords. Despite those protections, the World Health Organization estimates that 23 per cent of all deaths are linked to “environmental risks” like land and air pollution, water contamination and chemical exposure. Exposure to pollutants can also affect the brain, causing developmental delays, behavioural problems, and even lower IQ in children. In older people, pollutants are associated with Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease.

Hence, the environmental health fraternity recognizes the continuing threats to human health posed by pollution, and other environmental factors, and the need to improve and maintain the quality of the natural environment, air, water, food, housing and communities in order to reduce the impact of disease and public health.

3. Objectives of the event

The objectives of the event are to:

- Commemorate environmental health as a protective health service fundamental to an effective public health system.
- Recognize the dedication and hard work of Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs), educators, leaders and stakeholders for their contribution in the profession.
- Consult the environmental health fraternity on various key strategic documents and encourage discussions aimed at advancing the direction and interest of environmental health at all levels; and
- Share information on issues of common interest.

The main objective of activities at the community level on the commemoration of World Environmental Health Day should be to raise awareness to the general public on environmental health as an essential service towards prevention of disease and protection of public health.

4. Theme

The theme for World Environmental Health Day 2023 is – ***Global Environmental Public Health – standing up to protect everyone’s health each and every day.***

The theme is befitting because according to the WHO, 2016 data, more than 100 illnesses and injuries can be directly linked to environmental health concerns. Often, these issues have the greatest impact on communities that are poor and already have significant health care vulnerabilities.

5. Commemoration of World Environmental Health Day 2023

The National Department of Health in collaboration with the Cape Winelands District Municipality, Western Cape Province will hold a 2 (two) day conference in commemoration of WEHD 2023.

Global Environmental Public Health – standing up to protect everyone’s health each and every day.

The event will be held on 26-27 September in Stellenbosch, Western Cape Province.

5.1 Target audience

Approximately 450 (four hundred and fifty) delegates are expected to attend the event physically, and a virtual platform will be made available for presenters.

Delegates are expected from the environmental health fraternity, including Environmental Health Practitioners from all 9 provinces, other government agencies, students and educators from Institutions of higher learning, political leaders and various other stakeholders working in government and the environmental health space.

5.2 Proposed conference outline

The two-day event will be outlined as follows:

Day 1: 26 September 2023

Morning session – Political session (plenary)

- Addresses by various political leaders, including the Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla, MEC for Health: Western Cape province, Mayors of Cape Winelands District Municipality.
- Messages of support by key stakeholders, such as International Federation for Environmental Health (IFEH), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

Afternoon – technical session

- Presentations and discussions on various key environmental health topics by stakeholders and officials.

Evening session

- Gala dinner.

Day 2 – 27 September 2023

Morning session (plenary)

- Technical presentations and discussions continue.
- Breakaway sessions - 2 commission on Policy and Legislation:

Global Environmental Public Health – standing up to protect everyone's health each and every day.

Both Days

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

6. Buildup- activities

September is dedicated as Environmental Health month and Provinces and their municipalities, are urged to engage in various build up activities within the communities and areas of operations to raise awareness on environmental health as a profession and service. Subsequent to the transfer of Port Health Services to the Border Management Authority, on 1 April 2023, provinces are requested to ensure that build up activities incorporate activities conducted at the Points of Entry 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 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 2023” will be consolidated into a national plan that can be communicated nationwide and experiences shared during the main event.

6.1 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 - launch of poster competitions in schools on various EH 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.

6.2 Key campaign messages

- “A clean environment is a healthy environment”
- “Prevention is better than cure”
- “Break the cycle of disease”

6.3 Information, education and communication strategy

The following mediums can be utilized to raise the profile of environmental health in the communities;

(i) Social Media:

Use of **social media networks**, such as partnerships with Facebook, Instagram to distribute messages.

(ii) Use of print material

Environmental Health related IEC material could be distributed to schools, businesses and community gathering centers i.e., posters, pamphlets. Distributing a *fact sheet* on environmental health and engaging communities and answering possible questions.

(iii) The use of mass media:

Radio: The use of Regional/community Radio to flight messages, radio public service announcements (PSA's), radio health education programme (request of slot with local stations to interview EHPs on environmental health).

TV: Public Service Announcements adverts.

Newspaper: placement of newspaper articles and media statements etc. this could be achieved through Communication units.

7. 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 2023. Provinces should coordinate all plans from the municipalities to develop provincial plans and submit to the NDOH for consolidation of a national plan for noting in the national event.

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, Dept of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Dept of Fisheries, Forestry, and the Environment, among others.
- Health professions Council of South Africa.
- South African Local Government Association (SALGA).
- World Health Organisation.
- Institutions of Higher Learning and other research institutions.
- Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
- NGOs working on environmental health.
- Border Management Authority.

Cluster: Environmental and Port Health Services

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