

Environmental Health Training in Emergency Response (EHTER)

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The nation's environmental health workforce faces critical challenges in training and other key issues. Emergency preparedness and response training is particularly urgent, with several assessments identifying the need for such training as a critical gap.

To help meet this need, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) collaborated with federal, state, and local health and environmental health partners to develop the Environmental Health Training in Emergency Response (EHTER)—Awareness Level course.

During emergency responses, state and local environmental health programs perform many critical functions, such as conducting shelter assessments, testing drinking water supplies, conducting food safety inspections, and controlling disease-causing vectors. Many of these functions may fall within the existing role of an environmental health program, but an emergency event presents additional challenges and specific needs.

EHTER provides training on how to apply environmental health information in an emergency setting and addresses the following environmental health issues from this perspective:

- food safety,
- potable water,
- wastewater,
- shelters,
- vector control,
- responder safety,
- disaster management,
- solid waste and hazardous materials,
- building assessments, and
- radiation

Training Yields Better Prepared Communities

EHTER graduates have successfully applied their new skills during emergencies. They improved their response capacity during power outages, tornadoes, wildfires, and train derailments that led to the release of hazardous materials.

(Continued)

Geoffrey Snyder, Environmental Health Director in Madison County, New York, relates how EHTER prepared him for real-world emergency responses. "I feel very fortunate to have attended the EHTER course when I did. ... the CSX train derailment in Madison County on March 12, 2007, served as a prime example of why we need to be prepared for such emergencies," Snyder says.

"The concepts covered during the EHTER course," Snyder says, "were very helpful during the emergency and our subsequent response activities. We hope to secure the same training for all county environmental health staff as well as other public health staff and emergency responders."

An April 2007 EHTER course conducted in Kansas was also very timely. Just a few weeks after completing the training, graduates applied the information when an EF-5 tornado (strongest category) devastated

Greensburg, Kansas. Many of the officials who responded to the disaster were EHTER trained. They provided important assistance in areas such as food protection services (inspecting food services provided by relief agencies, salvaging food from damaged restaurants, and inspecting restaurants seeking to reopen), evaluating malfunctioning septic systems, treating wastewater that had come to the surface, sanitizing flooded basements, rehabilitating drinking water wells, assisting in environmental incident command operations, and participating in other critical environmental health tasks.

A Partnership for Success

In 2009, CDC signed a memorandum of agreement with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Center for Domestic Preparedness

in Anniston, Alabama. This partnership enables state and local environmental health practitioners to attend EHTER training in Anniston at no cost to them; DHS and FEMA pay for all related travel, food, and lodging. This arrangement helps state and local practitioners benefit from needed training at a time when they might otherwise be unable to receive it, given state budget crises and funding shortfalls for travel and training.

Next Steps in Emergency Response Training

CDC experts continue to work with key partners to improve the awareness-level course and to develop operational- and planning and management-level EHTER courses.

For More Information

and resources related to environmental health emergency response, visit CDC's Emergency and Terrorism Preparedness for Environmental Health Practitioners Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ETP>.

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