

Activity No. 3 – Specific EH Roles and Responsibilities

From a pre-incident perspective, it is vitally important to think about and document specific roles for environmental health staff. In reality, environmental health staff will have the same roles in a disaster as they do in their routine work, but some roles will receive greater emphasis, work will be done within a different structure, and staff may report to someone other than their usual supervisor. With regard to roles, one simple approach is to divide response actions or tasks into the following three categories: assessment, intervention and education.

What roles or responsibilities do you think environmental health staff would have if a disaster or emergency struck your community regarding: 1.) a foodborne outbreak, and 2.) solid waste.

Potential roles are included on the following page.

Activity No. 3 (Continued)

Foodborne Outbreak

Assessment

- Conduct inspection of facilities
- Identify basic food safety issues such as proper food temperatures, food storage, cross-contamination, cleaning and sanitizing, hand washing and personal hygiene
- Assist in development of a sampling plan and coordinate sampling and analysis of food, water or other materials
- Assist with interviewing patrons and/or employees
- Assist in the determination of fitness of foods for consumption

Intervention

- Assist other disaster-response agencies with food transport, storage and distribution logistics
- Assist with sorting, condemnation, and disposal of contaminated food at commercial establishments
- Determine corrective actions and make recommendations to facility managers, homeowners, and public health officials or other agency officials

Communication/Education

- Maintain frequent communication with all parties
- Provide collected information to epidemiologists
- Provide the public and businesses with information regarding the protection of perishable food, as well as proper preparation, storage, and disposal of foods under emergency conditions

Solid Waste Management

Assessment

- Check with appropriate contacts to determine extent of solid waste management system disruption
 - County environmental and/or emergency management staff
 - Solid waste facility operators
 - Waste haulers-private and public
 - Recyclers

Intervention

- Ensure that solid waste is properly and promptly stored, collected and disposed of to prevent vector nuisances (e.g., flies and rodents), odor problems, or potential contamination of food and water
- Serve as liaison with functioning facilities and collection services to try and ensure continuity of solid waste management services

- Work with appropriate contacts to publicize the availability of emergency disposal and/or transfer sites
- Serve as liaison between disaster site cleanup operations, waste haulers and disposal facilities. Determine if existing disposal sites are capable of accepting and properly disposing of waste

Communication/Education

- Provide information and guidance to businesses and the public about changes in the solid waste management system resulting from the disaster
- Provide public information about separation and storage, collection, and sites available for the disposal of solid waste
- Provide public information regarding disease prevention, vector control and safety