

Activity No. 4 – Organizational Framework for a Plan

A critical element in an environmental health emergency response plan addresses a framework in which the environmental health staff responds to a disaster or emergency. Environmental health response actions will focus on the consequences of a disaster and recovery activities following an incident. There are several ways to characterize and describe an organized response to a disaster or emergency. One approach divides all responses into categories or cases (e.g., major, minor or frequently occurring), while another strategy is to list specific roles and responsibilities, or specific tasks according to functional service areas (e.g., food supply, drinking water and wastewater). Which approach makes sense to you? Do you have an alternate idea? If so, please explain.

Text from two plans illustrating different approaches is presented on the following pages.

Overview of Response Procedures. - In an emergency situation, the Environmental Health Unit is responsible for the following:

- Ensure that all environmental health related regulated programs (e.g., food, beverage, lodging, children's camps, body art, individual sewage treatment systems and public swimming pools) within the County maintain acceptable sanitation standards or are closed until standards are met;
- Assist any disaster relief provider to prevent the occurrence or spread of disease with sanitation information and/or inspection of temporary housing, feeding centers, drinking water distribution and waste disposal;
- Improve the public's awareness of sanitation practices required to protect the food and water supply;
- Provide technical assistance to public and private sector organizations;
- Provide timely information to the general public, and
- Permit the installation of individual sewage treatment systems to ensure proper sewage treatment.

In addition to the items listed above, EH Unit staff will address the following items:

1. Specific roles identified in an EH Incident Action Plan will be assigned to staff based on their availability and expertise.
2. The structure of the Environmental Health Planning and Operations team will be expanded or contracted as needed during an incident.
3. EH staff could accept multiple or new roles depending on the incident. Staff may not have prior experience to draw from.

The Environmental Health Unit will follow the procedures described in this section in their response to a public health emergency. The procedures set forth under the heading Case I: Major Incident, apply to situations where Environmental Health Unit staff have been formally notified of a public health emergency through the County's Incident Command System. In such cases, they will report to work and operate within an Incident Command System described in the Hennepin County Public Health Emergency Preparedness Response Plan.

Procedures shown under the heading Case II apply to incidents where Environmental Health Unit Staff will respond to a minor, localized emergency situation relative to Case I. In this case, the County has not established an Incident Command System. The response will be managed and staffed by personnel within the Environmental Health Unit plus the Public Health Protection's Public Information Officer.

Procedures described under the heading Case III apply to situations where Environmental Health Unit Staff have the requisite expertise and training to directly and individually respond to commonly occurring incidents such as a fire or sewage backup in a licensed food establishment.

3.4.1 Case I: Major Incident

In this case, EH Unit staff will work within HSPHD's Incident Command System. Detailed information describing how HSPHD will manage an emergency situation is presented in the *Direction And Control Annex* to the Hennepin County Public Health Emergency Preparedness Response Plan. The written procedures are located behind the *Policy, Procedures, & Guidelines* Tab. Section VII in the *Direction And Control Annex* addresses procedures for notification and activation, and Section VIII focuses on procedures for direction and control. Flowcharts illustrating these procedures are located behind the *Quick Start Incident Command* Tab.

Appendix G in this Plan presents a flowchart that clearly illustrates how the Environmental Health Unit would function within the Incident Command System. **It is important to note that this flowchart mirrors all of the major activities presented in the Notification & Activation Procedure Flowchart, and the Direction & Control Procedures Flowchart.**

1. The HSPHD Incident Team decides that the situation qualifies as a public health emergency and the County's Public Health Emergency Preparedness Response Plan is activated. Incident Command is established and Environmental Health Unit staff will be part of the response.
2. The Incident Commander will provide a situation-status update to the Planning Section Chief and other members of the Incident Management Team. The Team will discuss the situation and address items such as: incident facts, potential response roles, response objectives, roles that the County may assume in a regional response, essential public health services to retain, priorities for assigning leadership positions, critical decisions and obstacles, and key messages that will need to be conveyed.
3. The Planning Section Chief will contact the Lead EH Technical Specialist and provide him/her with a situation-status update describing the incident.
4. The Lead EH Technical Specialist contacts and convenes other EH Technical Specialists to jointly draft an EH Incident Action Plan

7.3. Hazardous waste management

Following a major disaster, the unplanned release of a hazardous waste into the environment that poses a threat to human health and safety is likely to occur. A hazardous waste is any refuse, sludge, or other waste material that is capable of (a) causing or significantly contributing to an increase in mortality or an increase in serious irreversible, or incapacitating reversible illness; or (b) posing a substantial present or potential hazard to human health or the environment when improperly treated, stored, transported, or disposed of, or otherwise managed. Categories of hazardous waste include, but are not limited to: explosives, flammables, oxidizers, poisons, irritants, and corrosives.

Ramsey County Emergency Management and Homeland Security, local HAZMAT teams, and SPRCDPH Environmental Health, as appropriate, will coordinate with MDH, MDA, MN DOT, MPCA and EPA for removal and disposal of contaminated materials. In instances where city sewage/treatment is involved, local officials and public waste water system operators will be included in the discussions. Local hospital emergency departments, emergency medical services (EMS), and fire/rescue decontamination procedures will be followed.

In the event of an incident, EH professionals can help with the following activities: taking health and safety precautions at an incident site if hazardous wastes are present; identifying where vulnerable populations are located; and assisting in implementing procedures to assess and mitigate a hazardous waste incident.

TASKS

Assessment

- Determine if hazardous waste generators/facilities are causing the disaster or could be affected by the disaster.
- Perform health hazard assessments of hazardous waste or material releases to identify possible health hazards.

Intervention

- Provide technical consultation, training, and planning assistance to incident commander, emergency responders, public health officials and others regarding:
 - Impacts of decisions or activities on public health;
 - Sampling techniques and strategies;
 - Re-entry into contaminated areas;
 - Long-term monitoring of the environment; and
 - Long-term monitoring of the population exposed to the hazard.
- Assist in determining whether illnesses, diseases, or complaints may be attributable to exposure.
- Conduct environmental sampling.
- Monitor how the waste is disposed of to ensure it complies with regulations.
- Potentially provide oversight and direction for the overall hazardous waste incident response and cleanup.

Communication/Education

- Provide public information on the health effects of toxic substances.
- Provide public information to minimize risk of exposure.
- Provide public information and assistance regarding the disposal of household hazardous wastes.

7.6. Household Hazardous Waste

Ramsey county and neighboring metropolitan counties operate household hazardous waste collection programs. Following a disaster, the public will require information on how to manage household hazardous waste. In the event of an incident, EH professionals can help by doing the following: determining the extent of the problem; identifying specific community needs for information and education; and ensuring proper educational materials are disseminated.

TASKS

Assessment

- Assess nature of program disruption and determine timeline for reestablished service.

Intervention

- Work with existing contractors to assess their capacity to manage increased volumes of household hazardous waste.
- Evaluate options for providing alternative household hazardous waste collection service to the public.
- Discourage washing or disposing of hazardous materials into the sewers, drains or soil.
- Inspect household hazardous waste drop-off facilities.

Communication/Education

- Provide information about waste collection activities for homeowners.