



Chartered
Institute of
Environmental
Health

A local councillor's guide to environmental health

May 2011

Environmental health – a profession that makes a difference

If it affects the health and wellbeing of the public, or the stewardship of our natural environment, the chances are it is the role of environmental health to do something about it.

At local, national and international levels – protecting people from excessive noise, advising Government on food safety, tackling the causes of climate change – Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs)* are out there protecting people and our planet.

EHPs work for national regulators like the Food Standards Agency, the Health & Safety Executive and the Health Protection Agency. They work for businesses and other organisations in roles wholly or partly responsible for ensuring regulatory compliance. And many more EHPs work for local authorities providing regulatory services.

Regulation fulfils a number of public policy objectives, including public protection, fair business competition and environmental stewardship.

In local authorities much of the work of EHPs involves the discharge of statutory duties imposed on local government by Parliament. Many of the powers exercised by EHPs – for example, the service of a Stop Notice or an Improvement Notice or prosecution for a breach of the law – are given to them by Act of Parliament.

When it comes to public health services, EHPs are the main health practitioners within local government. As such they make a unique contribution to the wider public health service.

EHPs have the knowledge, skills, experience and level of engagement with their communities necessary to provide robust health protection and effective promotion of health and wellbeing. In the Government's plans for new public health arrangements in England, EHPs should naturally be part of the public health frontline workforce.

These are just some areas where necessary and proportionate regulation is carried out by EHPs:

- Air quality
- Carbon emissions
- Contaminated land
- Food safety
- Health protection
- Housing conditions
- Noise and other nuisances
- Pest control
- Pollution control
- Public health
- Smokefree public places
- Workplace safety and health and wellbeing

Our document *Environmental Health 2012 – A key partner in delivering the public health agenda* contained our vision for the contribution of environmental health to public health in 2012. This stated:

“Environmental health practitioners, working with and alongside other public health professionals, will be key partners in local and national efforts to protect and improve the health and quality of life of individuals and communities and to reduce inequalities.”

We believe that it is essential that the public health workforce is multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral and is not limited by professional boundaries.

Environmental charities provide another avenue, working at home or abroad. British-trained EHPs are taking their skills to developing countries from Africa to Indonesia, where they make a real contribution to some of the world's poorest communities.

* In local authorities EHPs are often called Environmental Health Officers

Environmental health – what we do

Environmental health is a scientific discipline. EHPs need a wide range of skills and an understanding of a complex range of issues.

The diagram below demonstrates the diversity and comprehensive nature of environmental health services.

EHPs take responsibility for alleviating all kinds of stressors that affect our lives and in all settings.

The education, training and experiences of EHPs make them exceptionally adept at problem-solving, working in partnership with others and seeking holistic solutions.

Being able to communicate with a wide range of peoples, such as directors of powerful companies, landlords and the local police, is an essential quality.

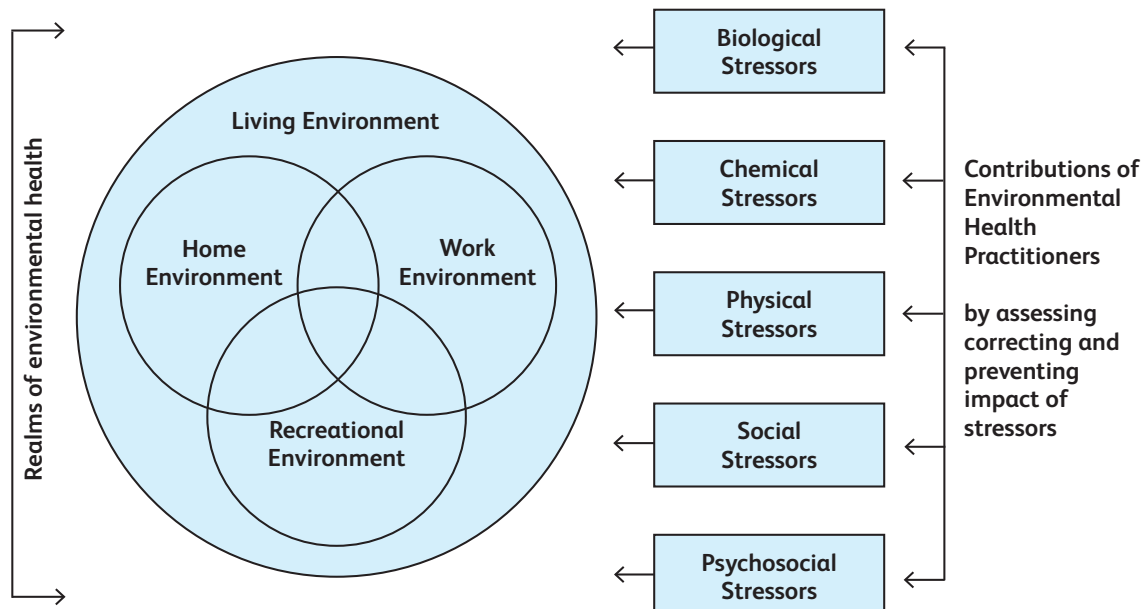
EHPs work in every sector of our economy and in every community to keep people healthy and safe and to reduce health inequalities. They contribute to the local and national economy, specialising in one or more areas of environmental and public health practice, as consultants and trainers and working in central and local government.

Whether it is a case of tackling a major outbreak of infection or helping to revive a run-down neighbourhood, EHPs are highly valued by the communities they serve.

It is vital work, satisfying too. It helps improve health chances for all, tackle the social determinants of ill-health and reduce health inequalities.

EHPs protect, support and improve the fabric of our communities and help maintain a level playing field for good, wealth-creating businesses.

Scope of Environmental Health



About environmental health

Climate change

Climate change is an observable reality. The change under way is impacting on us now and will continue to impact in future years.

Preparing for sudden and unexpected weather incidents, like overwhelming flooding or life-sapping heat waves, involves critical environmental health readiness. So too the need to adjust to new air and water borne diseases, new pest threats and exotic diseases brought to our shores by the change in climate.

In all probability, the main cause of climate change is human activity, particularly our propensity to burn carbon fuels. Without change in our habits, climate change will go on getting worse, causing catastrophic harm to future generations. We have to mitigate future climate change by changing our habits now.

Greater energy saving efforts, more use of renewable energy sources, changes in travel patterns with more walking, cycling and use of public transport, these are some of the solutions – and EHPs promote them all.

Environmental protection

There is growing public awareness of the science linking our physical environment and human health.

The air we breathe, the water essential for so much of our daily routine, the noise we are exposed to, the land we build on and cultivate, all can affect our health. It is the role of EHPs working in environmental protection to protect us from potential danger.

EHPs co-ordinate responses to disasters, assess contamination of sites proposed for new development and control noise from a variety of activities. They have good scientific knowledge as well as technical, communication and arbitration skills.

Food safety

EHPs protect the public from food poisoning including serious diseases resulting from E.coli and Salmonella outbreaks. They lead the way when it comes to food safety and hygiene as well as promoting a healthy diet, access to wholesome food and sources of food and drink that are secure and sustainable.

EHPs are involved in tackling food fraud, which can be very harmful to public safety, economic development and fair business competition. They conduct investigations with the police to target criminals supplying unfit meat.

They also teach those on low incomes the basics of cookery and nutrition, while the CIEH is a major supplier of training products and qualifications for food safety and food hygiene training. All these approaches have a bearing on obesity, the quality of school meals, the effect on anti-social behaviour and many other aspects of daily life.

Food inspections, in hotels and cafes as well as hospitals and schools, have as their primary purpose the protection of the public. And increasingly, public information schemes managed by EHPs are displaying information about food hygiene that enables all consumers to make informed choices.



Housing conditions

Good housing is fundamental to health. Disease, depression, hypothermia, asthma – all can be symptoms of unfit housing. From overcrowding and a lack of amenities to pollutants, fire safety, excess cold, damp or disrepair, EHPs work to ensure standards are maintained and action is taken if these standards are not met.

Securing a disabled facilities grant and providing advice and assistance to meet the needs of vulnerable householders, licensing houses in multiple occupation and helping to bring empty homes back into use as homes for people in housing need – these are ways in which EHPs help improve life chances.

Accidents in the home – slips, trips and falls – and illness, even death, brought about by lack of affordable warmth in winter months are serious hazards that environmental health services are there to prevent.

EHPs can make a big difference, whether inspecting rented accommodation, helping vulnerable owner/occupiers, dealing with a housing association to discuss a work programme or advising Government on new legislation to improve the quality of student accommodation.

Occupational health and safety

Every year, workplaces are the scene for deaths, serious injuries and industrial diseases for workers and lawful visitors. Employees and the public are entitled to assurance that employers are complying with proportionate and risk-based safeguards. EHPs are closely involved in this work as is the CIEH. It is through high standards of occupational health and safety that we reduce the number of personal tragedies as much as is humanly possible.

Promoting healthier lifestyles and safer workplaces is a key strand of improving public and environmental health.

Providing advice for the safe operation of sports and leisure events, or coming up with a campaign to warn against the danger of using a sunbed, health



and safety practitioners are at the forefront of protecting people from possible harm.

Law enforcement is an aspect of the job, too, and if a business fails to protect its staff or customers adequately, enforcement action can be taken.

Public health

The three distinct pillars of public health – protection, health promotion and healthcare – are home territory for environmental health services.

Tracing contacts during an outbreak of infection or contamination and halting the spread, leading on walk-for-health programmes and working with NHS partners to improve mental wellbeing, EHPs are addressing not just the medical determinants of health but also the social determinants of health.

As Sir Michael Marmot's report *Fair Society, Healthy Lives* (Feb, 2010) makes clear, there is a social gradient to health and we will only reduce health inequalities if we tackle the so-called "causes of the causes" of ill-health. This is where environmental health services excel.

While old enemies such as tuberculosis and measles still exist, there are new challenges, too. Tackling skin cancer, smoking in public places, obesity, poor nutrition and infections associated with body piercing and tattooing are all in a day's work for EHPs working in public health.

Pest management is also an environmental health service contributing to good public health. Disease and stress are known health risks that EHPs tackle.

About the CIEH

As a **professional body**, we set standards and accredit courses and qualifications for the education of our professional members and other environmental health practitioners.

As a **knowledge centre**, we provide information, evidence and policy advice to local and national government, environmental and public health practitioners, industry and other stakeholders. We publish books and magazines, run educational events and commission research.

As an **awarding body**, we provide qualifications, events, and trainer and candidate support materials on topics relevant to health, wellbeing and safety to develop workplace skills and best practice in volunteers, employees, business managers and business owners.

As a **campaigning organisation**, we work to push environmental health further up the public agenda and to promote improvements in environmental and public health policy.

We are a **registered charity** with over 10,500 members across the UK and, increasingly attracting members in many other countries around the world.

If you have any queries or comments about environmental health services, please feel free to speak to any EHP or contact the CIEH for more information.

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An example of Environmental Health Practitioners delivering this vision today:

'Warm Homes', a project managed by an Environmental Health Practitioner using partnership funding from the Strategic Health Authority, PCT and Acute Trust, together with funding from Energy Saving Trust. It ensures that insulation and other grants are targeted on the groups in greatest need. By helping keep people warm in their homes during cold weather EHPs reduce the risk of people developing *haemoconcentration* (thickening of the blood). Evidence shows that reducing this risk also leads to lower risk of heart attacks, strokes, mental illness and falls in the home.



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