

Environmental health: Global initiatives and new analytic approaches

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Editorial

Environmental health and protection plays a vital role in ensuring a “healthy ecological and human environment” (Kotchian 1997). In this way, it is demonstrably closely linked with public health. Environmental health is also generally regarded as a key core competency area in public health education (ANAPHI 2001), and also noted as a key component of courses in related fields, such as occupational health (Leggat 2001). None-the-less, much of environmental health is perceived to be regulatory and somewhat separate from public health (Kotchian 1997). Because of this increasing regulatory role, environmental health needs to become more analytic in its quest to quantify exposures and estimate the risks to particular populations from environmental hazards to particular populations. New analytic approaches, information technology and modeling, toxicological studies, and risk assessment assist the environmental health professional in meeting this need (Gochfeld and Goldstein 1999).

Risk assessment itself is based on information from toxicological or other quantitative analyses and epidemiological studies. Information on the risks of various chemicals and other agents is derived from several sources, however the World Health Organization (WHO) has developed the Global Environmental Epidemiology Network (GEENET) to assist with this task. WHO established GEENET as part of an initiative “to create networks of professionals working on the health effects of environmental hazards and human exposure, pollution, control technology, and environmental management and planning” (WHO 2001). It has particularly targeted developing countries to strengthen their educational, training and research capacities in environmental epidemiology (WHO 2001).

Over the last few decades, governments, non-governmental organizations and the general public have become much more concerned with environmental health and quality of life. Health indicators have started to take account of environmental health matters (UNEP 2003). In addition, broader interest in environmental issues has also seen the development of various international and national programs. These include international agencies, such as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP 2003) and also the WHO (WHO 2003), but also national agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency in countries like Australia and the United States of America. In addition, international and regional agencies, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Asian Center of International Parasite Control, have also included environmental health initiatives as key components of related School Health programs (UNESCO 2002; ACIPAC 2003). Environmental health professionals have taken various leadership, policy and technical roles in assisting such agencies.

Gochfeld and Goldstein (1999) articulated well for environmental health professionals the major lessons learned in the 20th Century and the challenges in environmental health for the 21st Century, namely:

“environmental health scientists must participate in policy debates;
environmental health problems are exceedingly complex and
require interdisciplinary research; and
environmental health is a global issue”.

Many global influences on the environment, which have the potential to affect health, often transcend boundaries between rural and remote and urban areas. However rural and remote areas have their own unique environmental health concerns.

The *Journal of Rural and Remote Environmental Health* continues to address important issues in environmental health, with a particular emphasis on rural and remote areas, in the context of an international networking medium as an Internet based journal. The feature articles deal with practical issues written by professionals working or who have previously worked or researched in rural and remote areas. The *Journal of Rural and Remote Environmental Health* is continuing to make an important contribution to finding solutions to global problems.

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