



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
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WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DAY

A SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN CAPE TOWN

September 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change is an urgent global crisis that poses significant threats to public health. It affects the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we consume, and the places we call home. As temperatures rise and extreme weather events become more common, the connection between climate change and public health is clearer than ever.

The role of Environmental Health Practitioners is recognizing the urgent need for climate change adaptation and the implementation of effective interventions; our Environmental Health Practitioners are ideally positioned to support communities in adapting to these challenges. Their expertise is crucial in mitigating the health impacts of climate change, especially for vulnerable communities.

On September 26, we commemorate World Environmental Health Day, led by the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH). This year's theme focuses on "Creating Resilient Communities through Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation."

The City of Cape Town's Environmental Health Practitioners will engage with various stakeholders to discuss this important theme, which includes:

- Focus on the City's and Provincial climate change strategy, climate change impacts on Air Quality, Water Quality and Equity, and practical approach to climate change.
- Staff Wellness, awareness and education about the impacts of climate change on health and well-being.
- Advocate for action to support of initiatives aimed at disaster risk reduction and climate resilience in the community.

SUMMARY/EXAMPLES OF HOW IT IS AFFECTING ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIFICALLY

Climate change is not just an Environmental Health issue; it exacerbates social inequalities that directly influence health outcomes. Vulnerable communities face heightened risks due to socio-economic factors that limit their capacity to adapt to climate impacts, affecting access to adequate basic services i.e. water, sanitation and waste management systems.

- **Food Safety Risks:** Increased temperatures can lead to foodborne illnesses, particularly in households or businesses lacking refrigeration or proper food storage during hot weather.
- **Water Quality Issues:** Higher temperatures contribute to poor water quality, including algal blooms in both inland and coastal waters, posing risks to human health.
- **Waterborne Diseases:** Informal or unsuitable water bodies are often used for cooling off, increasing the risk of exposure to waterborne diseases.
- **Vector-Borne Diseases:** Warmer conditions facilitate the breeding and spread of insect vectors, while decaying waste can attract rodents and flies, further spreading diseases.
- **Infectious Disease Transmission:** Hot weather can escalate the transmission of infectious diseases, including diarrhoea and cholera.
- **Water Pollution from Flooding:** Floodwaters can flow through areas with damaged sanitation systems, increasing water pollution and the risk of gastrointestinal illnesses.
- **Respiratory Health Risks:** Increased air pollution from urban fires and prolonged wildfires leads to respiratory issues, particularly for vulnerable groups with pre-existing conditions like asthma or tuberculosis.
- **Greywater Use:** While using greywater during droughts can conserve water, improper handling can expose individuals to pathogens.
- **Hygiene Challenges:** Droughts reduce water availability, compromising hygiene practices essential for safe food handling and overall health.

MITIGATION STRATEGIES

On this World Environmental Health Day, we highlight the vital work of the City's Environmental Health Section. Their dedication often goes unnoticed, yet they play an essential role in creating safer, healthier communities. As challenges like climate change, population growth, and socio-economic factors increase, their efforts become even more crucial. To combat the health risks posed by climate change, we must recognize the interconnectedness of environmental health and social determinants.

- **Air Quality Interventions:** Tackling indoor air pollution and regulating outdoor air quality to protect public health.
- **Fire Prevention:** Proactively addressing overgrown properties before fire season to reduce wildfire risks.
- **Waste Management:** Collaborating with food businesses to develop waste management plans that minimise organic waste in landfills, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Land Use and Development:** Reviewing land use plans to identify potential health risks associated with climate change and recommending improvements in ventilation, water supply, and waste management.
- **Community Education and Promoting Behavioural Change:** Implementing campaigns that inform communities about climate risks and promote adaptive behaviours for resilience. Inform communities about safe food and water practices, especially during extreme weather conditions.
- **Promoting Sustainable Practices and supporting Vulnerable Populations:** Encourage practices that enhance resilience, such as efficient water use and improved waste management.
- **Improving Infrastructure:** Advocate for better sanitation and water management systems to withstand climate impacts.

In the 2023/24 financial year, the City's Environmental Health Practitioners exceeded their targets in a number of performance indicators, as outlined below:

Activity	Performance	Target
Number of days when air pollution exceeds RSA Ambient Air Quality Standards	18	68
Number of Health & Hygiene Projects related to informal settlements completed	1233	1151
% food samples complying with relevant legislation standards	85%	75%
Number of block baiting stations for vector control of rats	85 203	75000
Number of visits to schools for Health Promotion Outreach Programmes	1555	1388
% Health Hazards Identified escalated to internal line departments	100%	98%

WHAT CAN THE PUBLIC DO TO HELP?

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHP's) are at the forefront of tackling environmental health challenges and preventing diseases linked to our surroundings. As climate change increasingly threatens public health, EHPs are dedicated to helping communities adapt and thrive.

We urge the public to recognize that addressing climate change is a shared responsibility. Individuals can contribute by:

Reducing your carbon footprint:

- Embrace sustainable practices like recycling and reducing food waste.
- Conserve water and report any environmental pollution incidents, such as sewage overflows.

Supporting Air Quality Initiatives:

- Get involved in local efforts to improve air quality and raise awareness about climate change's impact on our health.

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Engage in Local Environmental Health Initiatives:

- Participate in community projects that enhance resilience against climate change.

Advocate for Climate Action:

- Urge local, national, and global policymakers to prioritize sustainable practices and climate initiatives.

Policy Implementation

- Influence policy review and decision making by actively engaging through stakeholder engagement and public participation processes.

The City's Smart Living Handbook offers practical steps you can take to save money, protect the environment, and ensure safer living spaces. Visit the Smart Living website for more details: [Smart Living Handbook](#).

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH – THE WAY FORWARD

City Health is dedicated to prioritising climate adaptation strategies within its framework to safeguard public health and the environment. Here are the key actions we are implementing:

- **Integrating Climate Considerations:** City Health policies will reflect the impacts of climate change to ensure a proactive approach to health challenges.
- **Behaviour Change and Communication:** Public advocacy, awareness, and education programs will be introduced to inform and empower communities about climate-related health issues.
- **Enhancing Surveillance Systems:** By monitoring and evaluating climate-related health trends, we can respond swiftly to emerging threats and safeguard public health.
- **Strengthening Community Resilience:** Collaborating with City service departments to enhance disaster preparedness and response capabilities within communities.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Developing a comprehensive climate change strategy that addresses environmental health factors and creates platforms for sharing innovative ideas to mitigate health impacts.
- **Training and Skills Development:** Offering training programs for City staff and Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers to build capacity in climate adaptation.
- **Proactive Pollution Response:** Collaborating on efforts to address coastal and inland pollution incidents and their impacts on infrastructure and health.

If you notice any health nuisances or have environment health-related complaints, please report them to the City's call centre at **0860 103 089** or visit your nearest Environmental Health office or clinic.

Let's make progress possible—TOGETHER!

END