

Emergency Management and Environmental Health

Andrea Spiteri

Department of Health and Human Services



DHHS Emergency Management

Emergency Management Branch – 38 staff

Director, Deputy Directors x 2

Operation Divisions

Directors Emergency Management
and Health Protection x 4

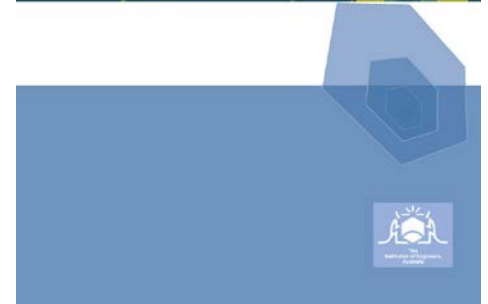
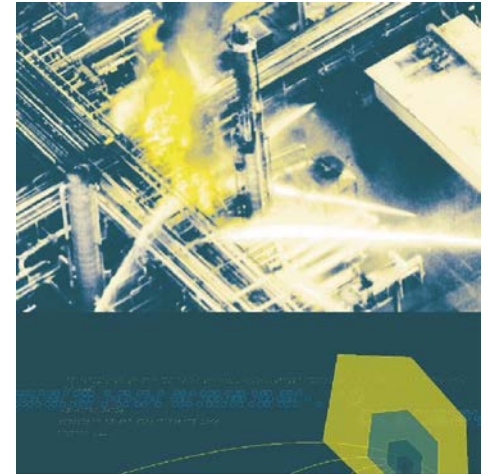
Key relationships

Chief Health Officer and deputies
Communications (HP & EM)



The beginning

- Ash Wednesday – for many the first major event involving EHOs
- For me - 25 September 1998 – Longford Gas Explosion
- Industrial accident – 2 workers killed, 8 injured, fire burnt 4 days
- Victorian households without gas for 20 days
- Community needs – public health information (how to live without gas), relief services (access to halls, showers etc.)
- Noted – lack of preparedness, lack of resilience/lateral thinking but willingness to take advice



Emergencies and environmental health

Natural disasters - Bushfires and floods

Immediate – as soon as properties can be accessed - general impact assessment, advice and PPE for household on environmental hazards, assessment of septic systems, hygiene and food safety

Longer term – back into the business as usual, often long after the emergency - mosquito control, asbestos clean up, blue green algae



Emergencies and environmental health

Mine fires – advice and actions for people exposed to smoke (particulates) and gases (CO) at unhealthy levels

Landfill incidents – information and advice on landfill gases and leachate

Industrial accidents/fires – information and advice on smoke and other hazardous chemicals



Emergencies and environmental health

Human health emergencies

DHHS is the Control agency

- Pandemics
- Significant outbreaks – for example legionella, with broader impacts on communities, economy
- Thunderstorm asthma – **new**
- What next?



Challenges for consequence management

Immediacy – social media, expectations

Scepticism – multiple sources needed,

empathy, engagement vs comms

Outrage – on the front foot, myth busting

Dr Google – reputable information

Prevention and preparation vs response



Developing EM knowledge, networks and experience

- **Training** - Emergency Management for Public Health Professionals course, general emergency management training, exercises
- **Networks** - Emergency Management Special interest Group, EM planning committees
- Environmental health **practice** in emergencies – adapted from hard earned knowledge through experience here and overseas, sourced from Australian and international experts (and legends) and informed by the Sphere Project
<http://www.sphereproject.org/>
- **Contributing** to emergency management planning – local, regional, state
- All links to **consequence management** – coordination of agencies to minimise the adverse effects of an emergency on people



Thank you

Questions?