

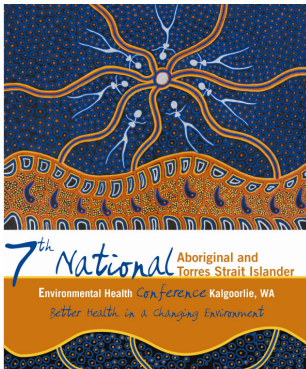
Environmental Health Association (Australia) Inc.

Issue 1

April 2009

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EHOs in Southern Africa wish to hear your views

By Michael Ncube

Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) in Southern Africa are traditionally at the forefront of disease control. One such disease that EHOs are actively involved in is malaria which still kills thousands of people within the region.

There is a whole array of weaponry used in the fight against malaria. The one that is universally practiced mainly in rural areas of the region is the tried and tested Indoor Residual Spray (IRS) method. This involves spraying a solution of an insecticide on the internal surfaces of habitable structures so that the residue of the pesticide is deposited on these surfaces in doses lethal enough to kill the malaria transmitting mosquito when it rests on the walls before biting the occupants of the sprayed structure. A wide range of insecticides are available for this purpose. These include pyrethroids, organophosphates, carbamates, organochlorines etc. Criteria usually used to choose a suitable insecticide include its residuality (how long after spraying does it remain lethal to mosquito), side effects to the occupants and those applying the insecticide, environmental consid-

erations, availability, cost, target specificity etc. Pyrethroids tend to score more and are usually the insecticide of choice. They do have their own weaknesses as well.

A well known organochlorine currently being used in IRS is DDT. The chemical has in the past been extensively used in agricultural pest control campaigns. Studies after that indicated that it has adverse effects on the environment as it is not readily bio-degradable. It has been described as a nasty, archaic molecule which is environmentally unfriendly and is banned in most countries of the world. It is said to be non target specific, contaminates the environment, gets into public waterways, the food chain and has been isolated in humans living down stream from areas of application years after it was applied.

A debate is raging within the region as to whether it should be used in IRS programs or not. Those against it cite the above reasons as justification for its ban. Those for its use argue that it is effective against mosquitoes, it has probably the longest residuality, it is the

cheapest and hence allows the cash strapped regional governments who fund these IRS programs to stretch that scarce dollar to protect more people, its residuality allows advance spraying of areas that become inaccessible after the first rains. It also allows only one spraying per year in those areas where malaria transmission is right round the year as opposed to twice per year if say, pyrethroids were used. They also argue that when DDT is used as an agricultural pesticide, it is used in high concentrations, in the open and hence gets washed into the soil and waterways by rains. However when used in IRS programs, it is used in lower concentrations, sprayed on the internal surfaces of enclosed structures and hence very little, if any, chance of residues being washed into the open waterways to be a significant contaminant.

EHOs are part of this spirited polarized debate and are on both sides of the divide. I invite you to consider the merits of both arguments, come up with your verdict and say it out. You may help influence the final position and save lives of people far away from where you live and work.

Mosquito-borne disease risk spreads to the Pilbara region

The Department of Health has reiterated its warning to people living and holidaying in WA's north to take extra care against mosquito bites because of the risk of mosquito-borne viruses.

Medical Entomologist Dr

Michael Lindsay said that the Department's surveillance program (undertaken by The University of Western Australia) had now detected activity of the rare, but potentially fatal, Murray Valley Encephalitis (MVE) virus in the Pilbara

region for the first time this wet season.

Kunjin virus, a related mosquito-borne virus, which can cause milder human disease has also been detected in the Pilbara for the first time this wet season.



Message from the Chairman

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Environmental Health Association (Australia) Inc. As the Association grows in membership, we are pleased to take a more prominent role in environmental health in Australia.

Your Association Executive is very conscious of the need to develop a visible identity for the Association both in Australia and internationally. The pathway of a "new kid on the block" is to establish that there is a difference in its operations, how it relates to stakeholders and its interaction with the outside world. The pathway for the EHAA is to provide an individual focus to support its membership and to become the central image of environmental health in Australia.

In 2008, I visited Tucson Arizona to attend the Annual Education Conference of the National Environmental Health Association (USA). This association represents Environmental Health nationally although I noted that just about every state has its own association. It was an outstanding experience to attend conference and some of the initiatives learnt have already been integrated into the management of our organisation.

One such initiative is to now formally announce the creation of the Dr Richard Lugg Award for Sustained Excellence in Environmental and Public Health in Australia.

Richard Lugg has provided leadership in public & envi-

ronmental health in Australia particularly in recreational waters for water borne diseases in marine & estuarine waters and aquatic environments and is a world renowned expert on waters microbiology. Richard made a significant contribution to the 2008 NH&MRC "Managing Risks in Recreational Waters".

The Award will be presented annually with a medal and honorarium to a person recognised as practising sustained excellence in environmental and public health for a period not less than twenty years. We look forward to receiving nominations when the applications for the award are opened.

One of the strengths of the NEHA is to incorporate industry as an equal partner within the professional association. Such involvement has brought industry knowledge and experience into the conference not as a sponsor but as an equal partner.

Inviting industry as an equal partner presents an opportunity for industry to identify its products to a wider audience but also incorporates research and development melded into papers and presentations at conferences and seminars. In conjunction with the release of this newsletter will be the opportunity for industry, local, state & federal government agencies, educational institutions, small business and individuals in business to join the EHAA as a Corporate Member. We believe that Corporate Membership of the Association will be seen as a benefit not

only to industry and the EHAA but as a benefit to the entire Environmental Health Profession.

In 2008 the Australian Institute of Environmental Health launched its new name that had very similar name to our Association name. This new body is called the EHA. Hence in order not to confuse just about everybody else in the world, we moved a few degrees of separation from EHA to EHAA. Our domain & email names will continue as www.envirohealthaustralia.com.au and info@envirohealthaustralia.com.au as they are now widely recognised within the environmental health profession. Although we do welcome interaction with our environmental health colleagues, we believe there is plenty of room for two environmental health professional bodies in Australia.

Planning for our National conference in September is underway and we seek expressions of interest from persons from the environmental health profession & industry wishing to prepare papers for the conference. Details on how to prepare an outline of your paper will be lodged on our Conference page of the web site.

Please enjoy reading this newsletter and take the time to send us your feedback via email to;

info@envirohealthaustralia.com.au. Your feedback in text or letters to the editor are most welcome.

Llew Withers
Chairman

Next seminar Friday, 22nd May 2009, 3pm-5pm "Environmental Noise - Hand Held and Permanent Monitoring"

Noise & Vibration Measurement Systems (NVMS) based in Leederville have represented Brüel & Kjær for over 20 years; during this time they have grown to support all aspects of occupational and environmental noise through equipment sales,

training, NATA calibration and product development. We would like to take this opportunity to present the Brüel & Kjær 2250 Sound Level Meter, preferred by most local councils, and introduce some advanced noise monitoring solutions

including the latest systems used to manage noise at most of the world's airports. We will also present exciting news for urban and industrial noise management.

For more information or to register to attend email
info@envirohealthaustralia.com.au



**Where is the
Environmental
Health
Profession
heading?**

Editorial

By Chairman—Llew Withers

The opening topic of discussion at the National Conference incorporated four panellists speaking on their concerns about the future of the environmental health profession. Why had this come about? The profession has been weakened by splitting off the environmental protection and pollution control responsibilities to the EPA. Very soon, there will be major disquiet as the Food Regulatory Authorities intend to take food away from Environmental Health Practitioners.

Interestingly the National Conference was held in United States not Australia. I was struck by the alarming similarities between the environmental health profession in United States and that of our own. In Australia, the functions of noise, clean air, waste management, occupational health & safety, building inspection and wastewater all came from environmental health. It seems we as environmental health officers are continually giving away functions to ease our workload than adopting a more disciplined approach to recognising our profession as a diverse mixture of disciplines.

In the 1980s in Australia we devolved Occupational Health & Safety and Environmental Protection with the introduction of the Occupational Health & Safety and Environmental Protection Acts respectively. In the 1990s, the advent of the Building Code of Australia as a whole of Australia document started the process of devolution of building control responsibilities and in the 2000s, the Food Acts are being devolved. Where will it end with local government finding very hard to find dollars and creating compliance officers who appear in many situations to be paid better salaries than graduate EHOs!

What is happening nationally? We know that the Environmental Health Council of Australia (the enHealth Council) is working on initiatives to try to predict future directions of the Environmental Health Workforce. A number of state bodies are working co-operatively to try finding a way forward. Is enough being done?

The Environmental Health

Association Australia believes that an education pathway to deliver practitioners into the workforce has merit and is now urgently needed. Persons entering the profession should be made at Certificate and Diploma level, at undergraduate level and at Post Graduate level. The present pathway for persons working as EH Technicians is haphazard and we are seeing large number of Technicians or Assistants undertaking environmental health work without any formal qualifications. If we continue on this pathway it will be seen as the norm and getting change will be very difficult.

The professional status of the Environmental Health Technician remains unrecognised. EHAA extends an invitation to those persons undertaking studies towards an Indigenous Certificate or Degree course and undertaking undergraduate or Post Graduate Degree to join the association at Environmental Health Worker status.

Only those persons working under the mentorship of a qualified environmental health officer will be considered for membership. It is folly to suggest that compliance officers and others who are not in training to become an EHO can be considered as an EH Assistant or Technician.

Environmental health assistants/student cadets/technicians/workers need recognition with an appropriate salary structure while undergoing training to become an EHO. Many local governments employ students to become EHOs in this manner and their status needs recognition. Our members are working on competency levels for EHOs and your feedback in this area is very welcome.

Students undertaking post graduate entry into the profession need a pathway to gain employment as an environmental health assistant/technician/worker. Until environmental health technician has a qualification while training, it is unlikely that the profession will grow preferring to devolve functions as the easy and often most practical option.

EHAA believes that the Envi-

ronmental Health Profession needs to embrace a wider range of specialisations such as environmental protection, occupational safety & health, building control, town planning, health impact assessment, food technology, toxicology and waste management. All these areas were born from public health and perhaps instead of devolving to others, it is time to reclaim lost territory and reinvent the profession to recapture the skills under the environmental health banner. If we continue with the present pathway, will environmental health eventually become redundant?

EHAA invites discussion on the future of the Environmental Health Profession. It is apparent that there is a deafening silence in the promotion of environmental health in Australia. There appears to be no promotion of environmental health at a national level and therefore it is very apparent that this vacuum must be filled. While promotion and publicity is an expensive pathway to follow, without the voice of environmental health, there will be neither national focus nor change in attitudes to promote environmental health profession.

We applaud those who are active in promoting public health through the Public Health Advocacy Institute but they cannot be expected to address issues beyond their borders. If you have an interest in being active in environmental health through advocacy, education or promotion, please become involved in your association or join the EHAA. Your profession will be much better for your contribution.

We welcome your comment on these issues raised in this article. Your voice is perhaps the one that is missing from the debate. It's easy to be apathetic, sometimes it takes courage to get involved.





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MEMBERSHIP

EHAA was formed to enable members to express their opinions across a range of public health and environmental health concerns. The second central feature is that, as a federated, autonomous incorporated organisation, all decision making to be undertaken at State Level.

The *EHAA* objectives are very broad, decidedly so to allow our organisation to move in many directions, to reflect members' needs and the changing face of environmental health.

The federated system places emphasis on ensuring accountability for members' funds and communication to outside stakeholders. The *EHAA* manages its own budgets and reports through an annual general meeting to members. This ensures that their local concerns are reflected in decision-making and State organisations can be flexible and innovative as they conduct their day-to-day business.

The federated system ensures that formation of an Australian Council is constituted by representative State bodies.

EHAA conducts an Annual Conference and in each membership year will:

1. conduct (4) SIG sessions with complimentary members' attendance
2. return an operating profit for investment in the future of the organisation
3. publish quarterly electronic bulletins
4. launch an "Employment Directory" for professionals and graduates accessed via our website and newsletter
5. provide regular industry mail outs
6. actively represent members in a wide range of government and industry discussion papers

If would like to become an EHA member or would like more information about becoming a member please visit our membership page at www.envirohealthaustralia.com.au or email info@envirohealthaustralia.com.au

Employment

For full details visit www.envirohealthaustralia.com.au

Assets and Planning Manager
(Engineer Qualified)

Wyong Shire Council, NSW

Technical Administrator (Building Surveying)

Davis Langdon, QLD

Assistant Building Surveyor

Davis Langdon, VIC

Cadet Building Surveyor (Part Time)

Davis Langdon, VIC

Coordinator Environmental Health

Cockburn (City of), WA

**Sustainable Transport Officer &
Traffic Modeller**

Perth (City of), WA

Strategic Town Planner

Perth (City of), WA

To receive email updates of positions vacant, register on the Environmental Health Association (Australia) website.

Sponsored by LGNet.com.au

Up coming events...

For more information or to register to attend any of the EHA events email info@envirohealthaustralia.com.au

22 May 2009

Environmental Noise - Hand Held and Permanent Monitoring Seminar

**Grace Vaughan House,
Shenton Park**

23-25 September 2009

Annual EHA Conference

**River Suites, Esplanade Hotel
South Perth**

CALL FOR PAPERS

5th Annual EHA Conference

Presenters from the Environmental Health and allied professions are invited to share their experiences and knowledge with attendees from both the metropolitan and country regions. The topic and theme of your presentation can be as broad as you like, provided that it can be linked back to the conference theme.

Send a precise of your paper to info@envirohealthaustralia.com.au by 30th May 2009 for

