

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

What is Environmental Health?

We are in contact with and are able to affect and be affected by our environment in all spheres of human existence. Whether we be at home, at work, or at play, whether breathing air or consuming food and water – our health and the health of others around us is influenced by the quality of his environment and the extent to which we pollutes it with the waste products of our existence.

Environmental health is that science that studies hazards in the environment, their health effects and the variations in sensitivity to exposures within populations and it explores the development of effective means to protect against hazards in the environment.

“Environmental Health comprises of those aspects of human health, including quality of life, that are determined by chemical, physical, biological, social and psychosocial factors in the environment. It also refers to the theory and practice of assessing, correcting, controlling and preventing those factors in the environment that can potentially affect adversely the health of present and future generation’s (World Health Organisation).”

The Role of Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs)

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) are appointed in terms of the [National Health Act \(61 of 2003\)](#). EHPs execute their duties by means of a Risk Assessment and Risk Management framework in order to reduce or eliminate hazards.

The Constitution as well as the National Health Act and various other regulations, regulations relating to inspections and investigations (GN1128 of 1991) under the latter place specific duties on a municipality regarding pro-active and re-active environmental health protection measures and environmental risks management which may only be applied and performed by a duly qualified and registered EHP according to the Health Professions Act.

It is a criminal offence to execute any function / duty within the ambit of the scope of profession of an EHP if not qualified and registered under the Professions Board.

The functions to be executed is a constitutional directive to give effect to the Bill of Rights contained in Chapter 2 of the Constitution, with specific relevance to section 24:

- “ Everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and
- To have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures”

The Sub-Directorate is entrusted with the following responsibilities set out in Parts B of schedules 4 and 5 of the Constitution:

Air pollution; child care facilities; municipal health services; funeral parlors and crematoria; the control of public nuisances; the licensing and control of undertakings that sell food to the public; the control of undertakings that sell liquor to the public and noise pollution.

Municipal health services are defined in the National Health Act No. 61 of 2003 as a list of historical environmental health functions such as:

Water monitoring, food control, waste monitoring, disease surveillance, vector control, environmental pollution control, surveillance of premises, disposal of the dead and chemical safety.

The functions of an EHP is also under the auspices of the Health Professions Council of South Africa defined as the “ Scope of Profession”.

