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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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1 Environmental health work

Environmental Health Practitioners can help improve the health of the people in their communities by performing the tasks listed in their duty statement/job description.

The effectiveness of the work of EHPs depends a lot on the support they get from their communities and community councils.

A DVD has been developed by enHealth entitled *“Introduction to Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: An Environmental Health Resource”*. EHPs are encouraged to view this DVD as it showcases many of the issues that need to be considered when planning environmental health activities and interacting with community members. You should be able to get a copy of this DVD from your state or territory environmental health head office.

2 Starting and managing environmental health work

There are two main parts to the management of a community’s environmental health program. These are:

The community council’s role

This role includes:

- the management of the EHPs
- acting upon the EHPs program plans and other recommendations
- working with the EHP to help make plans and programs effective.

The Environmental Health Practitioner’s role

This role includes:

- planning the environmental health program in consultation with the community and its council
- making sure that the plan is carried out
- doing all the routine and special environmental health jobs which are expected of him or her.

2.1 THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S ROLE

The council should have a say in deciding which environmental health tasks the EHP is to do and which ones have the greatest importance.

Often the community council will have administrative staff or a coordinator to operate its regular business. The coordinator should supervise or support the EHP's day-to-day work activities.

Before an environmental health program can operate in a community, the people, through their council, must make a commitment to providing the support that is needed to get the job done well.

For any environmental health program to operate effectively, the council must provide the following supports:

Office

The council should provide the EHP with an office. This may be a building or a vacant room. If there is no such space then part of the community's office could be used.

Wherever the office is located, it will need to have:

- office furniture, such as desk, chairs, filing cabinet, waste paper basket, notice and planning boards
- access to a telephone. It is best that a telephone be in the EHP's office, but if this cannot be arranged the EHP will need to be able to use a telephone in the community office. Apart from an office phone, the EHP should have access to a mobile phone for when they are working out of the office
- stationery, such as paper, pens and files.

Tools and Equipment

It is important that the council provides the EHP with the tools and equipment to do the work that is required and a secure place to store them. This could be a lockable shed or room within a building.

A list of tools required by the EHP will be provided by the council. This may include:

- a mop and bucket
- long and short-handled shovels
- metal and grass rakes
- a crowbar
- a hammer

- a masonry chisel
- screwdrivers (small, medium, large)
- a file (half round bastard)
- a cement trowel
- adjustable spanners (small, medium, large)
- a large Stilson Pipe wrench
- multi grips
- a 100mm plunger
- a hacksaw and spare blade
- a tap reseating tool
- a set of manual operation pipe cleaning rods
- a tool box
- a wheelbarrow
- consumable items: washers, suitable O-rings, tap gaskets, thread tape, PVC glue, grease
- pest control safety equipment: PVC gloves, PVC apron, PVC boots, lightweight overalls, cloth hat, respirator and appropriate canister, goggles
- a whipper-snipper and grass cutter may be considered
- pest control equipment and materials
- dog handling equipment such as muzzles, leashes, slip knot rope.

Some of these items may be made available to community members through a community loan system. Examples of equipment which could be lent under such a scheme would be a wheelbarrow, grass cutter, whipper-snipper, rakes and shovels. Tools and equipment must be stored in lockable secure storage. In communal storage, a lockable cupboard should be provided for EHP equipment. Where this is not available, a lockable shed will need to be supplied.

It is the community council's responsibility to replace stocks of pesticides and other consumables as required.

You can get advice on supplies from the EHO, the Shire or from the EHP trainer.

2.2 THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONER'S ROLE

In order to do the job properly, the EHP must be well organised. This means that:

- regular maintenance is done
- records and tools are stored so that they can be easily found so that they can be used when needed
- equipment and tools are kept in good working order so that time is not wasted fixing them when environmental health jobs need to be done.

3 Planning the environmental health program

The routine work of an environmental health program must be planned ahead.

Developing a **work plan** allows the EHP to manage his or her time effectively. Without a good plan a lot of time can be wasted and very little gets done.

A work plan is like a road map. It gives people direction in their work. A good plan should show:

- what is going to be done
- when it is to be done
- how it is to be done.

A work plan should also show what equipment, materials and people will be needed so that the work can be done.

Some of the EHP's jobs will need to be done daily and others will need to be done as soon as the problems are reported. As well as this, there will be regular weekly and monthly tasks to be done.

Any EHP's work plan should include:

- an outline of what these jobs are
- the days they are to be done
- the tools and equipment needed for each job.

It is important that the council knows of the plan and approves it and that through the council the community will know what jobs will be coming up and how it will involve them.

From time-to-time there will be emergencies, such as a blocked toilet or a broken sewage pipe, which must be fixed immediately. The EHP's plan must allow some spare time each week so that routine jobs can be allocated new times when emergency work has to be done.

All plans should be worked out so that the jobs can be done within the hours for which EHPs are paid. Otherwise, they may get discouraged when they cannot get the work done or when they are doing work for which they are not being paid.

Yearly plans

It is a good idea at the beginning of a year to plan when all the major tasks, such as dog treatment and checklisting, will be done during the year. These jobs can then be marked on a special chart on which blank spaces are provided for each month of the year. This is called a yearly planner. The jobs to be done are written in the space on the chart at the date on which they are to be done.

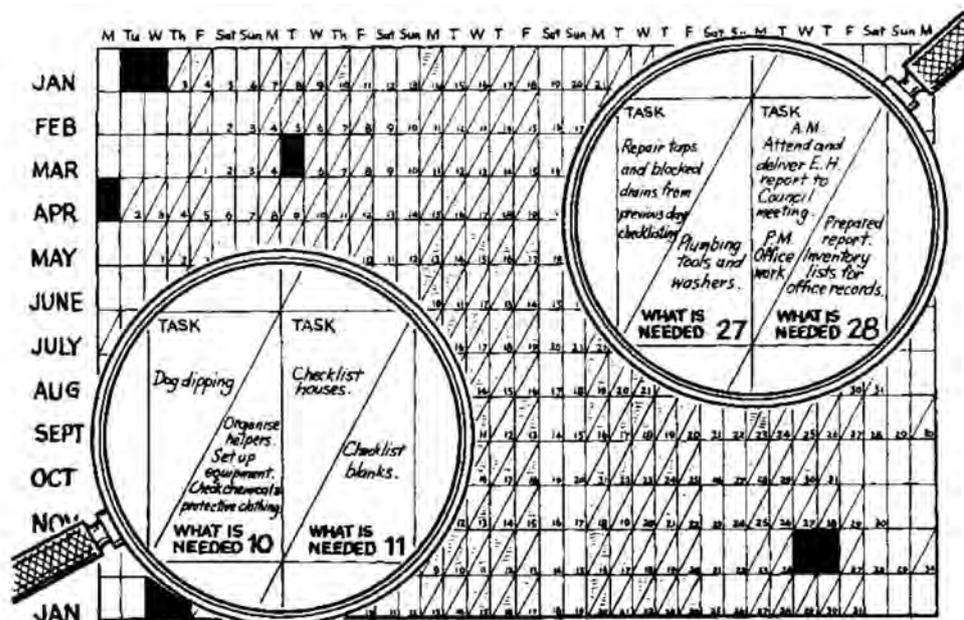


Fig. 7.1: Yearly planner.

Weekly plans

Weekly plans also should be prepared. These plans contain the routine and major tasks (from the yearly planner) which the EHP decides to do on each day from Monday to Friday and the times at which they are going to be done. At the end of each week, the weekly plan for the following week should be prepared.

Planning an environmental health work program for a community requires a lot of thought, especially if it is a large community or there is need to plan the work of more than one EHP.

The planning process will need to include:

- consultation with the community and its council on what they think should be done
- all the routine environmental health work which the EHP knows must be done, for example, checklisting, dog dipping and rubbish collection.

The routine work must be accepted as being important by the council and must take priority (first place) over any additional non-emergency tasks the Council may wish to be done.

It is the EHP's job to prepare the plan and explain it to the council. The EHP may, at times, need to convince the council and other people in the community about the importance of completing priority tasks before tackling others.

It is important to follow the work plan. There are many ways to plan a work program and these suggestions may be useful:

- (a) The EHP will need to think about:
- » All the environmental health facilities that need to be checked. For example, sewage lagoons, rubbish tips and water tanks; and
 - » Any environmental health problems which have been reported by the community or noted during checklisting will also need to be included.

This information can be used to make decisions about:

- » What tasks need to be done and how often; and
- » How much time needs to be left to deal with unexpected problems which have been reported or found. These decisions are placed on the planner showing when they are to be done. Time should be left on the planner for emergency jobs.

- (b) If there are several EHPs, they should meet regularly to discuss the work that needs to be done and who is going to do it.

- (c) Routine tasks which must be included in the plan include:

- » checklisting
- » equipment inventories and maintenance
- » regular environmental health jobs. For example, checking sewage lagoons and rubbish tips, pest control operations and dog dipping
- » health education/promotion activities
- » ordering replacement materials, such as pesticides, plumbing parts

- » office duties, such as filing, completing records, including daily timesheets and diaries
- » reporting to council and attending meetings
- » maintaining contact with the Environmental Health supervisor and/or the local EHO.

Meetings should be held at the start of most working days to work out the details of how and when the jobs listed on the plan will be done.

4 Checklisting

When an EHP goes out and looks for problems he/she will need to complete the **checklist** for each building or facility visited. This is called **checklisting**.

Every yearly plan and many weekly plans will need to include tasks related to checklisting.

This is a very important part of the work. Often people will not report problems such as leaking taps. Sometimes people do not even know there is an environmental health problem.

Checking for problems, through checklisting, is important if the community and its environment are to be kept clean and safe.

How is checklisting done?

Checklist forms are used to record the problems as the EHP finds them in the community. The checklist forms can be used on:

- dwellings
- toilet blocks
- sewage ponds
- rubbish tips
- other community facilities, such as playgrounds, stores, community hall, roads, streets and general areas.

The checklist form contains a list of all the environmental health items in a house or other facility. For example, a house checklist will include plumbing, hygiene matters, pests, rubbish, structural conditions and provide a space for the EHP to record any other comments. Space is provided on the form for the EHP to show problem items with a mark.

When an EHP finds a problem, he/she should mark the form by placing a tick or cross against the problem item. The EHP should use the information on the checklist to:

- plan his/her work
- provide reports to the community
- keep records of environmental health problems.

Checklisting requires the EHP to visit people's houses and other community buildings. It will be necessary to get permission from householders and the Council. It is also important to let them know when checklisting is to be done.

The EHP may have to stop during checklisting to fix an emergency problem.



Fig. 7.2: Checklisting.

Once the checklists have been filled out it is very important that the EHP:

- uses them to plan what work needs to be done. All jobs which need to be done should be written on the planner and special note should be made of tasks which need to be done urgently
- makes sure that the problem gets fixed, even if it means organising a contractor to do the work
- files the checklist in the filing cabinet after the jobs have been written onto the planner.

It is important to keep the checklists as they will provide the EHP with the past history of environmental health problems at a particular place. Checklists should be filed under their location, for example, 'House No. 6', 'Southern Toilet Block'.

How often should checklisting be done?

Checklisting should be done at least twice a year. However, if the community has lots of environmental health problems, checklisting may have to be done more often until all the problems are found or controlled.

5 Getting the job done

Planning and checklisting are important jobs, but it is even more important that the EHP gets the work done. That is, that the EHP fixes the environmental health problems. This is the only way to make sure that the problems that cause disease or poor health are removed or fixed.

How much work should an EHP do?

The EHP must work the required hours for which he/she is paid. The amount of work which needs to be done may, unfortunately, need more time to finish than the hours for which the EHP is paid. When this happens, the EHP must do the priority (most important) work first and advise the EHP supervisor of the need for extra help.

If the workload remains high, the community may need to consider paying the EHP to work more hours or increase the number of EHPs.

The community may also need to assist by providing workers to help:

- with emergency work
- when the EHPs are busy or
- when the work calls for a team of people, for example, a dog treatment program.

Remember, there are some tasks where the EHP organises or provides advice about the work, but is not responsible for actually doing all of it him/ herself. Such work includes community clean-ups and routine domestic cleaning.

6 Reporting

Reporting is very important because it lets people know what the EHP is doing or has done, and tells them about the environmental health problems in the community.

This can be done by giving:

- **verbal (speaking) reports** to the council, at community meetings, to the Environmental Health supervisor or to the local EHO, and EHP education staff
- **written reports** to the council, to the Environmental Health coordinator of your region and to other agencies identified in an employment contract, such as the coordinator of state or territory Indigenous Environmental Health. Written reports are also important to keep as office records on community environmental health matters.

Written reports need only be short. They should describe:

- the environmental health work being done
- any difficulties being experienced and include suggestions for improvements and/or requests for assistance when needed.

All reports and letters should be dated and signed by the EHP and a photocopy or carbon copy made and kept in the file.

This is a list of some of the important people/agencies to whom the EHP should report.

The community and its Council

This should be a regular task and be done at council or community meetings. By talking at these meetings, the EHP will keep people informed on what is happening so that the community can support the environmental health work. By doing this, the community will also get to know the EHP.



Fig. 7.3: Reporting to community Council.

The Environmental Health supervisor and the Environmental Health Coordinator of your region

It should be a regular task to maintain contact with these people. It is important to tell them about current environmental health activities and to seek technical support, information and assistance when needed. This contact can be made by telephone or during routine visits.



Fig. 7.4: EHP working with EHO.

Indigenous Environmental Health Practitioner teaching staff

Contact with teaching staff is usually made during their routine visits to the community or by telephone. These people can assist the EHP:

- on matters relating to training and running community education sessions
- by providing assistance with getting technical information from health officers and EHP supervisors
- by keeping EHPs up-to-date with courses and in-service training.



Fig. 7.5: Reporting by telephone.

Other agencies

Other agencies which have a direct interest in environmental health matters in the community should be informed on issues which specifically concern them.

These agencies may include the Shire (local government) or the relevant Department of Health.

7 Office work

Office work includes tasks such as:

- completing and/or correcting work plans
- filing
- preparing reports
- routine telephone calls
- ordering supplies and equipment
- preparing correspondence (letters)
- filling out rosters and diaries
- taking inventories of tools and equipment.



Fig. 7.6: EHP's office.

The filing cabinet should be divided into labelled sections for the purposes of filing the EHP's records and copies of correspondence. It is much easier and quicker to find records if each section in the filing system and each file within each section is placed in correct alphabetical or numerical order in the filing cabinet.

There should be one section for checklists. This section can be divided into smaller sections—one for each house or group of houses, such as 'Houses 1 to 5', and community buildings and facilities, such as 'Community toilet blocks'.

There should also be other sections in the filing cabinet for papers which relate to tools, equipment and materials, correspondence, orders, rosters, and plans.

Filing should be done at least once a week, and the office should be kept clean and neat.

8 Maintenance and storage of equipment and tools

the EHP is responsible for making sure that all tools and equipment are well organised and maintained in good working condition. They should be stored in a separate secure place so that they are safe and easy to find. This is usually best done in a place which is separate from the office.

Lost tools are expensive to replace and much time can be wasted if they are not available and ready to use when needed.

It is usual for those who have responsibility for looking after tools, equipment and materials to keep an **inventory** (list) of these things.

The EHP should check off the inventory regularly and if any items have been loaned out and not returned, he/she must get them back. Breakages and losses and materials which have been used up should be reported to the community council administration and requests made to replace them.

It is a good idea to have a tool box equipped with the necessary plumbing tools and materials (washers, thread tape, O-rings) ready to be picked up and taken to a job.

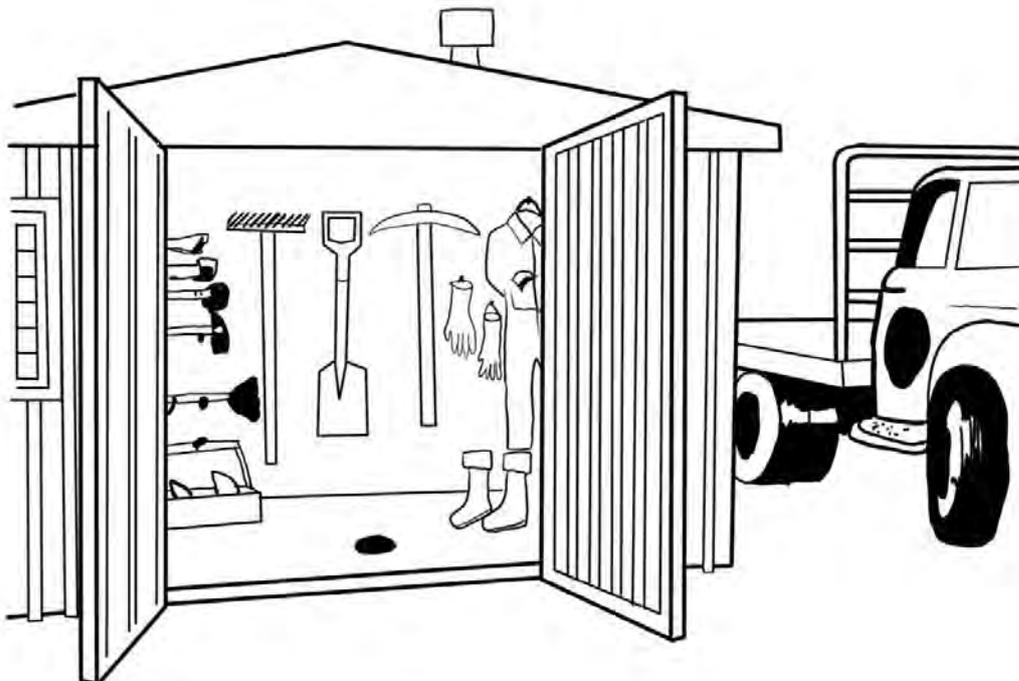


Fig. 7.7: Tool and equipment shed.

9 Community environmental health education

Educating the people in the community about environmental health is an important responsibility for the EHP.

Education sessions should be frequently and routinely held in the community. These might be held in the school, during community meetings or at individual houses.

Education activities should be planned well in advance and always written on the weekly and monthly planners.

How to undertake community environmental health education is described in the following sections.

9.1 WHY COMMUNITY EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT

Often, people do not understand the ways in which environmental conditions affect their health and therefore, don't know why they should have good environmental health practices. If this happens the work of the EHP may not be effective.

The best person to help people to understand about the importance of environmental health is the EHP.

Environmental health work will receive a much better response from the community if the people understand why the work is being done and how it is likely to improve their health. For example, by explaining that dog dipping is being done because it will result in less scabies and skin infections.

It is very important to teach people about the germ theory, parasites and the way that diseases spread, so that they understand why they should practise good environmental health.

It is also important to teach people how to practise good environmental health so that they know what to do to keep themselves, their homes and their community healthy.

9.2 HOW TO TEACH ABOUT GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

People can learn from:

- verbal (spoken) explanations
- demonstrations (being shown)
- observing (looking at) what others do
- getting information from books, posters, videos, pamphlets and other printed materials
- working things out for themselves.

People **do not** learn well when:

- they do not have the desire to learn
- they are not physically fit, such as when they are sick or tired
- they are emotionally upset, such as when they are angry or frustrated
- when the teacher does not explain things clearly.

People **do** learn best when:

- they want to learn
- things are explained clearly in words they understand
- they feel happy when they are being taught
- they are rewarded when they show that they have learnt what they have been taught. People are usually rewarded when they are praised for their efforts
- things are explained or shown to them a number of times and in a number of different ways
- they have the opportunity for actual hands-on practice, for example, dog treatments and plumbing repairs
- they are not distracted by other things going on around them.
- pictures and diagrams are used to explain difficult ideas
- they can use what they have been taught in their communities and homes
- they can understand the benefits their knowledge will have for them and their community.

EHPs need to understand that people often do not put into practice what they have been taught. This may be because they have not listened properly to the teacher, they have forgotten what has been said or they have not understood.

Even after people know what should be done and why, they often take quite a long time to change their poor environmental health behaviour. This may be because they:

- may not understand that practising good environmental health is important for them
- do not want to appear different to other people
- think it is too much trouble
- do not have the money to buy the necessary equipment
- do not have the confidence that they can change their behaviour. This often happens when people do not think much of themselves
- think other things are more important than health.

EHPs must have patience when they are teaching.

Preparing to teach about environmental health

Before an EHP teaches anything about environmental health to people in the community it is important that the following points are considered.

- It is important that the EHP fully understands what he/she is teaching.
- If an EHP does not fully understand the facts, it is highly unlikely that the learner/s will be able to understand either.
- An EHP **can find out what needs to be taught** by talking to the community to find out about their special needs, or by reading books, pamphlets and course notes on the topic and asking Environmental Health supervisors, Program teaching staff or an EHO.
- Regardless of where the lesson is being given, it will need to be **planned** to make sure that everything that needs to be done will be done.

A lesson plan should:

- (a) Have clear objectives.

The EHP should work out **what** it is that needs to be taught, to **whom** and by **what date**.

Example of an objective:

At the end of the lesson, the Year 7 class will understand the causes, effects on health and prevention of scabies.

- (b) An outline of the steps to be taken to meet the objectives.

Example:

- » Tell the class what scabies are, where they live, how they breed and how they affect people's health.

Teaching aids: Poster, audio-visual presentation

- » Tell the class how to get rid of scabies. This would include telling them about the special medicated skin wash which kills scabies, washing clothes, washing and airing bedding.

Teaching aid: Poster, sample of scabies treatment

Practical demonstration: Washing and airing clothes and bedding

- » Get the group to discuss how they can apply what they have been taught. Encourage them to talk about any difficulties they may have and work with them to find solutions.

9.3 TEACHING AIDS

Teaching aids are things which help the teacher explain what needs to be taught.

The best teaching aids for the EHP to use are pictures which can help him/her explain what needs to be taught. There are different kinds of teaching aid which have pictures. Examples are flip charts, client one-to-one cards, teaching posters, videos and DVD's, PowerPoint presentations, slides, overhead transparencies and stickers.

Flip charts

These consist of a number of cards with pictures on them bound together in a single file. Each chart is designed to help communicate one or two facts. All the charts together should provide enough information to allow the learner to understand the basic facts about a particular topic, for example, how to get rid of scabies.

Flip charts can be used for teaching from one to about ten people and are particularly helpful when teaching people who cannot read. The message is explained verbally as people look at the picture.



Fig. 7.8: EHP using a flip chart to teach children.

Client one-to-one education cards

These are single cards which are designed to provide the basic facts about a particular topic, such as how flies cause disease. Each card has a number of illustrations which together provide the information which needs to be taught.

These cards are used for teaching only one or two people and are designed to teach people who cannot read.

Posters

These are large pieces of paper which can be pinned up on a wall and which contain pictures and words about a particular topic, such as trachoma. The poster usually does not have many words and it should be possible to understand the message from the pictures.

All the information on a poster should be able to be seen from some distance away and it should be attractive enough to catch people's attention long enough for them to take in the message.

There are **teaching posters** and reinforcement **of message posters**.

Teaching posters are designed to help teachers explain what they want people to understand and learn.

Reinforcement posters are specially designed to remind people of certain important health messages which have already been explained to them.

After people have been taught the health messages in a poster, copies should be pinned up in places where they are likely to see them over and over again. For example in the clinic, community office, community hall, school and shop.

Videos and DVDs

Videos and DVDs are used to teach people new information or to remind them about health information that has already been explained to them.

Videos and DVDs are especially useful when the teacher is trying to encourage a group to talk about the subject which is being taught. For example, the teacher can ask the people in a group what they think about something which has happened in the video or DVD, such as an EHP doing checklisting. He/she can then ask them what they think the EHP is doing and why. The teacher can then go on to discuss with the group their willingness to have an EHP checklist their home.

Health messages can also go out to a lot of people when videos are shown on local community television.

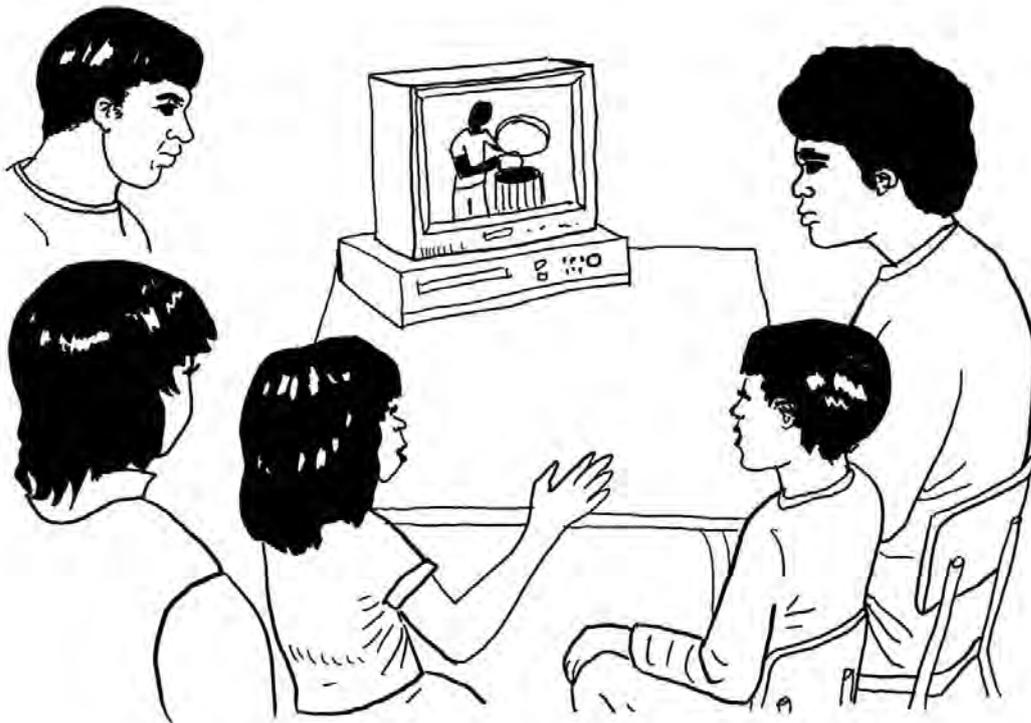


Fig. 7.9: Family watching environmental health video/DVD.

Normally, people do not learn facts from just being shown a video or DVD. They need to have things explained by the EHP as well. They also need to talk about and practise what they are taught.

PowerPoint presentations, slides and overhead transparencies

If there is a projector for PowerPoint, slides or transparencies and electric power in the community, these media devices can be used to help get health messages across to large groups of people.

These are expensive education aids and usually can only be borrowed from an education resource centre.

Stickers

Stickers are used to remind people about important health messages. They are often displayed in places where EHPs want people to put into practice something which they have been taught. For example, a sticker reminding people to put rubbish in a bin can be placed on a rubbish bin near where people drop a lot of litter.



Fig. 7.10: Environmental health stickers remind people what to do.

9.4 DEMONSTRATIONS AND PRACTICE

In addition to using teaching aids, a very good way of teaching people good environmental health practices, such as dog dipping, is by showing them the right way to do things. This kind of teaching is called **demonstrating**.

This method is particularly effective when the teacher also gives the learner the opportunity to **practice** what has been demonstrated. People learn better when they do the job themselves. For example, after showing how to dip a dog, encourage the learner to actually dip the dog him or herself.



Fig. 7.11: Demonstrating environmental health maintenance.

It is often a good idea to show people that good environmental health practice improves health. For example, an EHP and the Community Nurse may have run a program to get rid of scabies in the community. This program may have included screening for scabies, the treatment of affected people, dog dipping and education about the causes, health affects and prevention of scabies.

To be able to show that this program has worked, the EHP could ask the local Community Nurse to work out from the clinic records how many people came in for scabies treatment, including infected sores:

- during the month before the program started
- during the month immediately following the finish of the program.

If the program has been done well, there should be a drop in the number of people going to the clinic for treatment connected with scabies. If this has happened, it is important to tell the community about it.

9.5 WHERE TEACHING CAN BE DONE

EHPs can teach community members in different places. Here is a list of some of them:

Community meetings

Whenever the EHP thinks that community members need to know about an environmental health problem in the community, he/she should tell them about it at a community meeting. The EHP should tell them about the causes of the problem and what can be done to fix it. When the people know these things they will be in a good position to make decisions which will improve the situation.

People's houses

There are many times when an EHP will need to explain things to individual family members. Some teaching needs to be done with great care so as not to shame people. If there is any chance of this happening, it is best to visit their homes and talk to them on their own.

While working in communal areas

EHPs can often find opportunities to talk to people about environmental health matters when they are just having friendly chats with them outside the store, their homes, around camp fires at night or in the streets.

These times are good for telling them about the work EHPs do and why they are doing it. This helps them understand better the need for a clean healthy community.

Whenever possible the EHP should correct children who are seen to be behaving in a way which is likely to cause the spread of disease-causing germs and parasites. For example, they should be corrected when they litter, do not wash their hands after going to the toilet, play near leaking sewage pipes, or break water equipment. The more this is done in a friendly way, the better children will learn.

The school

EHPs can make arrangements with the school to teach environmental health topics to children.

It must be remembered that teachers work out their teaching programs well ahead of time, so it is wise to make these arrangements early in the school year. At the same time, talk to the class teacher about what needs to be taught and make sure that it fits in with his/her teaching program.

EHPs can offer to give talks in the classroom or to teach by taking students into the community and showing them how to recognise environmental health problems and the steps they can take to get them fixed.

10 Community development

The Indigenous Environmental Health Program is a **community development program**. That is, it is designed to help Indigenous people take charge of their community's environmental health management. It is about encouraging people in communities:

- to decide for themselves what needs to be done
- to take action to see that it is done.

It is the job of EHPs to encourage their fellow community members to make these decisions and to take the necessary action.

It will not be easy work because often people will not understand why environmental health is so important. The EHP will need to have a lot of patience and understanding. There will be times of frustration and disappointment. This is always a part of community development work because people, regardless of who they are and where they come from, are not quick to change their old ways. Eventually when people see that they stand to benefit greatly when their homes and communities are clean healthy places in which to live, they will start to change. For the EHP this can be very rewarding.