

Environmental Health Services in Europe

6

The development of professional associations

by Martin Fitzpatrick



WHO Regional Publications, European Series, No. 94

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professional associations

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Foreword

The Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in London in June 1999, endorsed a range of actions and programmes to enhance the status of environmental health throughout the WHO European Region. Nevertheless, no matter how well conceived, plans will make a difference only if they are implemented. This relies, among other things, on professional staff formulating appropriate actions and interventions for approval by decision-makers.

In the European Region, there is a diverse range of professionals engaged in promoting environmental health issues to promote the public's health. They work in state authorities, local government, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. All have a common purpose and very often have common or complementary knowledge and skills.

The developments that have taken place throughout the European Region in recent years have also seen fundamental changes in terms of the governance of Member States, with diverse and sometimes divergent views being given voice in decision-making. Environmental health professionals, both in terms of their professional lives and in the wider context as citizens, have been engaged at various levels in articulating their individual and collective voice in promoting the improvement of public health and environmental conditions. It is clear that one of the biggest challenges ahead will be to facilitate networking among these professionals, and

creating professional associations is among the many strategies available to achieve this.

In some European countries, environmental health professionals have organized themselves into associations, but in the majority such associations are not well established and have not realized their full potential in civil society. Given the increasing awareness of the general population and the emergence of specialized groups, there is a need for new means of communication that will ensure a constructive dialogue among professionals, decision-makers at political level, the economic sector and the general public. In this rapidly changing world, environmental health professionals must constantly adapt their practices, knowledge and skills. In this respect all partners at national and international level acknowledge the importance of professional associations.

It is against this background, together with the realization that at European level there is a need for a professional voice to be heard, that this publication to facilitate the development of professional environment and health associations in the European Region was conceived. The book attempts to provide a means by which groups of environmental health professionals can formulate their own template for developing associations that clearly represent their particular interests and ethos, within a framework whereby they can find common purpose with other professionals at national and international level.

This publication strives to bring together the collective experience of a range of existing associations of environmental health, while also providing the basic information that will be of particular value to an emerging association or to groups of professionals aspiring to develop such associations. In that sense, it is not a blueprint but a guide, and the need for such associations to find and follow their own evolutionary path is recognized.

A number of associations of environmental health professionals gave freely of their time and experience to make this publication possible. A number of individuals provided text and case studies that were invaluable in completing the book, and their assistance is greatly appreciated. In particular, the Chartered Institute of

Environmental Health must be thanked for its assistance and funding in order to make this publication possible. I should also like to thank Martin Fitzpatrick, South Western Area Health Board, Ireland, for his work as contributing editor.

Marc Danzon
WHO Regional Director for Europe

Introduction

The target audience for this book includes a very wide range of professionals and organizations, and it is important at this early stage to attempt to identify those for whom this guidance will have the most relevance. Previous reviews of environmental health services and environmental health professionals underscore the fact that there is a wide diversity in perceptions of environmental health, the management of environmental health services and the range of professionals engaged in delivering those services. Similarly, while there is a wide range of associations of professionals involved in the environmental health field, there are significant gaps in the information available on these associations.

WHO ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS?

In previous efforts to address this question, the WHO Regional Office for Europe carried out a major survey of professions involved in environmental health services during 1994 (1). The results of this survey yielded a list of no fewer than 31 different categories of professional involved in areas related to environmental health. Further consultations carried out with Member States on this issue resulted in a considerably larger list (Box 1).

Not all the categories of professional listed in Box 1 are to be found in every Member State, nor do all of the professions mentioned

Box 1. Categories of personnel involved in environmental health

Academics, lecturers, teachers, teacher trainers	Hydrologists
Agriculturists	Hygienists
Agronomists	Information scientists
Architects	Laboratory assistants/technicians
Bacteriologists	Marine scientists
Biochemists	Materials technologists
Chemical process engineers	Medical specialists (with postgraduate qualifications in the public health area)
Civil engineers	Meteorologists
Climatologists	Microbiologists
Communications experts	Noise inspectors
Disaster preparedness specialists	Nuclear safety managers
Ecologists	Nutritionists
Economists	Occupational health nurses
Engineering specialists (with postgraduate qualifications)	Occupational health physicians
Entomologists	Occupational hygienists
Environmental biologists	Physicists
Environmental chemists	Political scientists
Environmental engineers	Pollution inspectors
Environmental health administrators	Psychologists
Environmental health educators	Public health nurses
Environmental health managers	Public health physicians
Environmental health officers	Public health veterinarians
Environmental health planners	Public relations experts
Environmental health technicians	Risk assessors
Environmental lawyers	Rural and urban planners
Epidemiologists (with medical degree)	Safety inspectors
Epidemiologists (without medical degree)	Sanitary engineers
Ergonomists	Sanitary officers
Fire safety officers	Social scientists
Food inspectors	Social workers
Food safety specialists	Soil scientists
Geneticists	Statisticians
Geographers	Technical assistants
Geologists	Toxicologists
Health promotion experts	Transport planners/managers
Hydrogeologists	Water quality inspectors
	Zoologists

have equal roles in delivering environmental health services. Particular categories of professional might be totally unknown in some areas of the European Region, whereas they would be considered primary actors in environmental health services in others. Many of the professionals listed might not consider themselves to be “environmental health professionals”. The presence or absence of any profession in the list is not a value judgement by WHO of that profession’s role in environmental health.

The list in Box 1 is useful because it demonstrates the sheer diversity of professionals involved in environmental health.

From consultation with Member States (2) it appears that professionals enter the environmental health services by a variety of routes. First, there are those who have been educated and trained specifically as environmental health specialists, and operate in the environmental health field in a variety of roles and functions. Second, there are those in allied areas who have been trained as generalists or specialists in other specific disciplines, such as medicine, law or engineering, and who subsequently undergo further education or in-service professional development to achieve competence in environmental health issues. Third, there are those who, by rising through the hierarchy within their given sector, become involved in managerial and policy development elements of environmental health services as part of their broadened scope of responsibility.

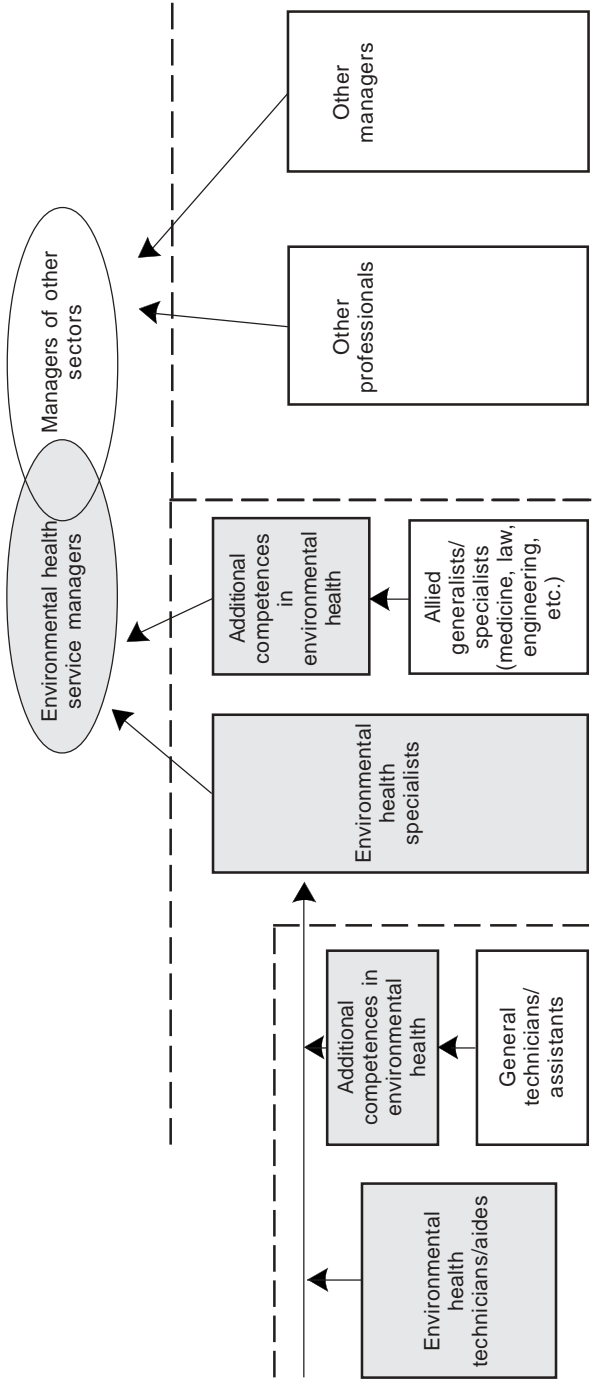
The pathways followed by these groups are shown in Fig. 1.

ASSOCIATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

There are few sources of information available on associations of environmental health professionals across the WHO European Region, making a review of existing associations difficult. Where information is available it is primarily derived from initiatives in the last decade in forming federations of such associations, including the formation of the International Federation of Environmental Health (3). The challenge at the moment is to identify similar associations and groups of professionals interested in forming such associations, and to nurture the unique contribution that they can bring to addressing environmental health issues throughout the European Region.

Existing associations of environmental health professionals have developed following an evolutionary path, although many of these associations developed at different rates and in different directions. Thus there are associations that have existed for over a hundred years, with large memberships, full-time secretariats and a range of commercial companies. There are also associations that were formed

Fig. 1. Career pathways for professionals working in environmental health



relatively recently, and which have fewer members and operate on a voluntary basis (3).

The rate and manner of development are affected by many factors. These include: the historical evolution of environmental health issues at national level; the relative strength and number of the professionals involved; the development of missions in specific priority areas; and the level and nature of contacts developed with external partners and international organizations.

PRESENTATION OF CASE STUDIES

There is no one model that serves as a guide for developing an association of environmental health professionals. Thus in this book we present a variety of comparative case studies illustrating how different associations deal with certain issues. The range of associations used in these case studies is limited, and has been chosen to illustrate how different associations that vary considerably in size and capacity address common issues.

STEPWISE APPROACH TO FORMING AN ASSOCIATION

The following checklist may help in identifying the initial steps necessary in forming an association of environmental health professionals. More detailed information follows later in the book.

1. Identify and bring together a core group of people who wish to set up an association.
2. Check the legal requirements for setting up an association.
3. Develop a short, written proposal outlining the perceived mission of the association, its possible functions, the membership criteria, structure and rules, and the initial financial requirements.
4. Create a fund through contributions from core groups to cover initial expenses such as mailing.
5. Develop a list of potential members and canvass them with the proposal.

6. Organize a meeting or series of meetings of potential members to discuss the proposal and revise it as necessary.
7. Launch the association (including legal registration as necessary) and invite applications for membership.
8. Set up a bank account in the name of the association to coincide with the launch.
9. Hold the inaugural meeting and elect officers.
10. Agree priorities for the association.

The Mission of Associations of Environmental Health Professionals

MOTIVATION FOR DEVELOPING A MISSION

Environmental health professionals are partners in the development and implementation of environmental health policies. This status is confirmed by the growing importance that the governments of Member States have accorded to them through the European Charter on Environment and Health (4), the Environmental Health Action Plan for Europe (5) and the London Declaration (6). The commitment to include representatives of environmental health professionals on the European Environmental Health Committee is another clear sign of the recognition gained.

It is against this background that associations of environmental health professions can develop a niche for themselves, and articulate a vision to their members and the wider community of their mission. Developing a *mission statement* encapsulating the purpose of the association is one means of articulating that vision. The mission adopted by an association will be determined and influenced by national and international issues, as well as by social, economic, political and cultural factors.

Developing this mission is an evolutionary process. In the case of some existing environmental health associations, the experience has been that professionals set up these associations with the combined aims of progressing the status of their profession, improving the

working conditions of its members, and improving the national status of environmental health. These aims are both laudable in their own right and not mutually exclusive. In some countries (though not necessarily all) where associations have existed for a number of years, the emphasis has changed from a primary concern with the professional status of the members to encompassing the needs of the wider community and including other voices in the environmental health debate.

This has to be viewed against improvements in economic and social conditions and the gradual acceptance of these associations by other players (local and central government, private sector interests and international organizations) as valid partners in dealing with environmental health issues. It is recognized that, while this is a worthy development, there are disparities in the way in which environmental and health professionals are considered across the European Region. The fortunate position that some existing associations find themselves in took many years to achieve. For newly formed associations, there may be specific issues to be resolved on the road to developing a working relationship with governmental and other partners.

BENEFITS TO SOCIETY

In defining its mission, it is important that an association clearly states the added value that such an organization brings to the wider society. This can be vital in terms of gaining the support and trust of governmental and other agencies. It is crucial that the wider community appreciate the benefits of having suitably competent, highly motivated professionals who can fulfil functions, carry out activities and perform tasks relevant to the needs of the society they serve. Well educated, highly motivated professionals who will be the leaders and service managers in their field are essential, and will contribute to the viability of those services. Individual members of such an association will also benefit from having a forum through which they can articulate their individual and collective needs, contribute to public debate and influence national policy and international initiatives.

Another benefit to society is the promotion of environmental health concepts. These concepts are based on three integrated actions –

advocacy, education and lobbying. For some countries in the European Region, these are new and uncharted territories. As in any sphere of human activity, there are vested interests whose values may be at odds with those articulated in the various international protocols on environmental health. The advocacy role of environmental health associations implies the defence of sound environmental health principles in a proactive manner. The target audiences for such activities include politicians and policy-makers, professionals in other sectors and the general public, as well as the association members.

The promotion of research and informing public debate should be fundamental elements in the brief of environmental health professionals. The right to lobby governmental institutions at national or local level is one that is taken for granted in some European countries; for others it is a more novel experience. As key actors in the field, it could be argued that environmental health professionals have a duty to take a lead in informing and shaping public opinion, and making representations to governmental bodies on important issues.

PARAMETERS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSION

Legislative and legal framework

The extent, or indeed the absence, of legislation governing the formation of nongovernmental associations will have a fundamental bearing on how an association of environmental health professionals will develop its mission. The legal framework will probably dictate the process by which such an association is formed and the various forms of registration necessary, and will determine the broad range of activities that may be undertaken.

The wider legal framework may also dictate the degree of leverage an association can exert on lobbying and influencing public opinion. The degree to which consultation takes place between governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations may also be incorporated in national or regional legislation.

The development of profit and non-profit activities by associations is also regulated in many countries, and special regard to the

differentiation of such activities may be important as an organization evolves.

National environmental health status

The capacity of Member States to tackle their environmental health problems in the short, medium and long term should be a prime consideration for associations of environmental health professionals in developing their mission. This involves assessing the general and priority needs of the society served. It also requires a review of national environmental health policy, and an appraisal of the structure and functions of those services that deliver environmental health services. While carrying this out is a major undertaking, environmental health professionals will have a clearer vision than most as to what the priority needs are. Once an association is formed, this review should be ongoing so that the efforts of the association can be attuned accordingly.

Present and future functions

The changing role and demands on environmental health professionals, and the changing societal needs and demands on the services they provide, should also be considered. WHO's book *Concern for Europe's tomorrow* (7) recognizes the importance of developing environmental health professionals who can respond to cultural and traditional demands as well as to urgent action. This has been underpinned by the commitment of Ministers of Health and of Environment to the role of environmental health professionals (6).

The need for an informed, credible voice

It is recognized that there is a credibility gap in some societies in terms of the trust that people are willing to invest in the instruments of the state or in business interests. Environmental health professionals have an important role in articulating a credible and informed perspective on important issues. The manner in which such a voice may be articulated varies across the countries of the European Region, and needs to be considered in formulating the mission of an association.

International developments and partnerships

There have been a number of positive developments in the European Region, which have put environmental health at the centre

of government commitments. The ongoing work on the Environmental Health Action Plan for Europe, which has its genesis in the Ministerial Conferences on Environment and Health in Frankfurt, Helsinki and London, provides a platform for environmental health associations to develop meaningful missions. There is also a range of ongoing activities that are independent of government initiatives to be considered. The existence of federations of associations of environmental health professionals in some regions, the gradual growth of national associations, and an increased interest among groups of professionals in setting up associations are encouraging signs of grassroots interest in the further development of such organizations.

In developing a vision for the mission they wish to pursue, associations of environmental health professionals may also wish to incorporate concepts found in the many initiatives that have evolved from the international community, including health for all policy (8) and sustainable development (9).

DEVELOPING THE MISSION

In reviewing the various missions that existing environmental health associations have set themselves, a number of common themes emerge. It should be borne in mind that these missions have been developed over a long period of time, and new or recently formed associations will have different priorities.

The range of issues that existing associations have set for themselves include:

- advocating the concepts of environmental health and integrating the needs of members with the benefits to the wider community;
- promoting the development of environmental health services;
- setting standards of excellence for environmental health professionals; and
- promoting the status of environmental health professionals.

Case study 1. Examples of missions set down by existing associations of environmental health professionals

Example 1. The Swedish Environmental Health Officers' Association (SEHOA) founded in 1920 (10)

The SEHOA Charter and Action Programme states that SEHOA shall:

- work for a suitable basic education, a comprehensive further training and specialized advanced education for environmental health professionals;
- currently inform its members about environmental and health issues by organizing courses and seminars and by publishing a periodical journal;
- look after and safeguard its members' professional interests both as a group and as individuals;
- work for an appropriate organization and other resources to ensure efficient and strong environment and health protection work;
- work for an adjustment and updating to current needs of environment and health legislation and directions;
- work for applied research within the field;
- work for better environment and health protection and promote the status and importance of environmental health work and issues.

Example 2. The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) (United States of America) incorporated in 1937 (11)

The initial mission is to establish a standard of excellence for this developing profession. This standard evidences that one has mastered a body of knowledge (which is verified through the passing of an examination) and acquired sufficient experience, thereby indicating that work responsibilities in the environmental health field can be satisfactorily performed.

Currently the mission of the National Environmental Health Association is "to advance the environmental health and protection professional for the purpose of providing a healthful environment for all".

It is the Association's desire to foster more cooperation and understanding between and among environmental health professionals, to contribute to the resolution of worldwide environmental health issues, and to work with other national professional societies to advance the cause, the image and the professional standing of the environmental health profession. At the same time, NEHA remains solidly founded by its roots in efforts to improve the environment in cities, towns and rural areas throughout the world in order to create a more healthful environment and quality of life for all.

Example 3. The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland, formed in 1983 following amalgamation of the Royal Sanitary Association of Scotland (founded in 1875) and the Scottish Institute of Environmental Health (founded in 1891) (12)

The main aims of the Institute are to promote the advancement of all aspects of health and hygiene, to stimulate interest in public health, and to disseminate knowledge on health matters to the benefit of the community.

Example 4. The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) founded in 1883 (13)

The mission of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health is to promote and secure improvements in environmental health and to support those who work to achieve them.

Example 5. Environmental Health Officers Association (EHOA) (Ireland) founded 1949 (14)

The aims of EHOA are:

- to promote the efficiency and usefulness of members by setting up a high standard of professional and general educational knowledge and by enforcing the observance of strict rules of personal conduct as a condition of membership;
- the promotion and interchange among its members and others of such knowledge of environmental health;
- the general promotion of the objects of environmental health and kindred objects;
- to organize, fund, maintain and hold classes for the study of environmental health;
- to hold examinations and to grant awards, grants and prizes; and
- to petition the government in the interests of the members of the Association where deemed necessary.

For a new or recently formed association it is important that the initial mission reflects the concerns of members, and balances these with wider societal issues. This will assist current and potential members in recognizing the benefit that can be gained from joining such an organization, both in terms of their individual professional development and the development of their profession. Developing a clear mission will also be useful in overcoming any doubts or misconceptions that those outside the organization, including government agencies, may have about the purpose of the association. Communicating this mission both internally and externally will be an important task.

2

Membership

The members are both the *raison d'être* and the most important resource of any organization. In the final analysis it is the vision and vigour that they bring to bear that will determine whether or not the organization thrives. Determining the basis by which individuals can become members expresses some of the basic values of an organization, and how it views its particular field of interest. Associations of environmental professionals, by virtue of their field of interest and their designation as “professionals”, tend to set down parameters as to the common bond that unites them as an “association”.

SETTING CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

Existing associations set criteria for membership that mainly involve having a recognized level of education and/or work experience in a relevant area. These criteria can evolve over time as the organization evolves. While basic education and professional experience are fundamental aspects of membership criteria, adhering to a high standard of personal conduct on becoming a member is another condition imposed by some associations.

While for historical reasons most existing associations might initially have a membership restricted to a specific range of professionals and recognizing a restricted range of qualifications, this trend

is changing in some associations. The transition to multidisciplinary organizations has been driven by a number of factors. These include the resolution of long-standing differences that may have existed between some groups of professionals, and the recognition that combining resources and efforts is more effective.

The imperative for a new association might be to initially restrict membership qualifications in order to bring a critical mass of people together with common aims and a common level of professionalism. It should be the aim of all environmental health associations that membership is seen as a valuable status not only by members but also by outside interests, including employers.

There are comparative benefits and disadvantages in either limiting membership to a narrow range of professional groups or in having a broader membership base, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Benefits and disadvantages of limited or broad membership bases

	Benefits	Disadvantages
Limited membership base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong common identity • Shared educational and professional background • Common professional aims • Critical mass of members working in same field • Easier to set common codes and professional standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibly limited perspective on issues • Danger of being introspective • Risk of being viewed as purely a "professional" lobby group • Possibility of being seen as a competitor rather than a partner by other professional associations
Broad membership base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse input of opinion and perspectives • Greater potential for dealing with emerging issues • Wider appeal to potential members • Wider sphere of potential influence • Possibility to influence allied professional groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in determining common focus • Potential for conflict of interests between different professions • Difficulties in finding consensus

GRANTING OF MEMBERSHIP

Membership of a professional association brings with it an air of pride in the profession and a commitment to maintaining high standards of conduct both individually and collectively. Membership should convey a sense of being recognized as a professional by one's peers, and should demonstrate a level of achievement and competence in reaching that position.

Existing associations of environmental health professionals have set a variety of criteria for accepting members, some of which are described below.

Case study 2. Criteria for membership of existing associations of environmental health professionals

Example 1.

The Swedish Environmental Health Officers' Association is an organization for professionals working in the field of environment and health protection. Most of the members are educated specifically as Environmental Health Inspectors, which nowadays is a 4-year degree-level education provided by the University of Umeå. Others, however, are educated in biology, chemistry or other natural sciences or are civil engineers. SEHOA has approximately 1000 members, mostly employed by local government but also by the national Government at regional or central level, as well as by institutions or private enterprise.

Example 2.

Membership of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health is available to people and organizations working in and with a commitment to environmental health. There are a number of grades of membership, which encourage the technical and professional development of each individual member.

Example 3.

The Bundesverband der Lebensmittelkontrolleure (Association of food and safety inspectors) is a registered nongovernmental organization for environmental health professionals in Germany. At present, only people that are in the employ of the government or the civil service or who are students can become members. The professional background of members varies. They can be people with a high degree of practical experience who, through a degree course of at least two years at a government academy, have qualified as food and safety inspectors. In this case the focus is on theory, such as legal aspects, whereas for those with a theoretical background the practical side is emphasized.

Example 3. (contd)

While some of those professionals who potentially become members of an environmental health association may work in public service, those working in the private sector should not be overlooked. The German experience on this is worth noting: "when the statutes were drawn up not enough thought was given to the future and no allowance was made for persons becoming members who were not in the employ of the civil service. This has led to differences of opinion and discussions between members. To change the statutes now would not be an easy matter".

Example 4.

Membership of the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland is open to all persons engaged in or interested in any aspect of environmental health. Predominantly orientated towards local government, with the majority of its members being Environmental Health Officers employed by Scottish Councils, the Institute's membership also includes community medicine specialists, veterinary surgeons, meat inspectors, public analysts and an increasing number of people employed in industry.

Example 5.

In Italy the Associazione Italiana di Ingegneria Sanitaria–Ambientale (Italian Association for Sanitary–Environmental Engineering) is the national organization for people working in environmental health. Most members have a university degree as engineers, but chemists, physicists, geologists, biologists and some physicians are also represented. The Association encourages a multidisciplinary approach to environmental protection and reclamation.

Example 6.

The majority of the members of the National Environmental Health Association (United States) work in the public sector (many are employed at local county health departments in the role of generalists), but there is constant movement towards a membership that represents the entire environmental health field. The only qualification to be a regular active member is that the person is a professional employed in the environmental field.

Membership size

Deciding on the critical mass of members necessary to form an association depends on local and national factors. While a large membership can be useful in sharing the workload, it brings its own challenges in terms of servicing the needs of those members. While increasing numbers can also mean increasing revenue from subscriptions, the level of work involved in administration will also increase accordingly.

Approximate levels of membership for some existing environmental health associations are shown in Table 2 (3).

Removal from membership

Membership of a professional association is a status to be valued. Individual members have the right to expect that their fellow members will conduct themselves in a manner that befits the collective ethos of the organization and in accordance with agreed standards. In turn, individual members have the responsibility to ensure that they take responsibility for their own actions and behave accordingly. Each organization should establish criteria for acceptable conduct, and provide for sanctions where these standards are not adhered to. Some organizations do this through codes of ethics, while others provide very detailed codes to cover particular areas of activity.

Where positions of trust are instituted in an organization, these positions carry particular responsibility and it is important that the holders of these posts clearly understand the level of conduct expected of them. It is particularly crucial if these positions involve

Table 2. Approximate membership of selected associations of environmental health professionals

Organization	Country	Approximate membership
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health	United Kingdom (excluding Scotland)	8500
Environmental Health Officers Association	Ireland	200
Finnish Communal Association of Environmental Health and Protection	Finland	400
Associazione Italiana di Ingegneria Sanitaria–Ambientale	Italy	800
Miljø & Helse (Teknisk Hygienisk Forum)	Norway	520
Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland	Scotland	900
Swedish Environmental Health Officers' Association	Sweden	1000
Bundesverband der Lebensmittelkontrolleure	Germany	2000

responsibility for the financial interests of the association. In particular, it is important that any conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, are declared or preferably avoided. It is also vital that transparent procedures are established so that improprieties can be dealt with, and that measures are in place to protect the rights of individual members.

Removal from membership is a serious matter, and the grounds for removal should be clearly defined from the outset. Furthermore, procedures that give members grounds for vindicating their actions, and appealing a decision to remove them from membership, should be laid down in the association's rules and procedures.

3

Organizational Structure

The elaboration of organizational structures that will support and facilitate the development of an association is one of the primary tasks that should be carried out by a newly formed association. All associations, regardless of how long they have been in existence, should also consider the periodic review and evaluation of these structures.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

It is important (and especially during times of difficulty) that associations of environmental health professionals have a bedrock of principles, and that these are expressed through the organization, structure, operation and culture of the association.

Democracy

“Democracy” and “democratic principles” are commonly used terms but it is worth revisiting what they involve. The essence of democracy is found in *participation*, by means of which those subscribing to democratic principles believe individual dignity and self-worth may be attained. In practical terms, this ensures that there is democratic control of the association by its members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Second, it implies that the men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership, that members have equal voting rights

(one member, one vote) and that the association is organized at all levels in a democratic manner.

It also implies that members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, all the various forms of capital (financial, intellectual, etc.) of their association. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the association. In many associations, members receive limited financial compensation, if any, for their contribution to the association, and such compensation is usually only for legitimately incurred expenses. Members may also allocate any surplus funds for purposes that include developing the association, benefiting the collective wellbeing of members and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

For practical purposes, some organizations divide into subnational or regional groups and, while decisions are taken at these levels, representatives are also vested with powers to vote on issues at national level. In developing this form of structure, it is important that sufficient information and freedom to act are given to ordinary members so that they can reasonably make policy choices through their votes. This implies issues such as freedom of speech and freedom to vote according to one's conscience without fear of retribution. Similarly, an association should ensure that internal rules and external policies should incorporate equality on grounds of gender and of religious and ethnic background.

It is important to realize that the internal democracy of an association will be affected by external factors, such as the current state of democracy in the country and the level of democratic participation in that country. There are also many cultural issues that effect democratic activity, and cultural nuances have a significant effect on how the primary element of participation occurs. It may be easier to interpret with confidence how such measures are progressing by comparison in the same country, rather than trying to compare two different countries.

Accountability

Accountability might be defined as the obligation to answer for the discharge of responsibilities that affect others in important ways. Within an association, decisions by those in authority may be part of

a stream, with each individual decision not appearing important but cumulatively resulting in events that affect members significantly. In these terms it is thus important to state that *people* account, not intangible things like “committees” or “working groups”.

Accountability is achieved in two stages. First, it involves identifying reasonable standards for answering on issues or proposals that concern members. Second, it requires those with responsibility to answer for their responsibility and duty. Because their decisions have important effects, this accountability means that members could then ask better questions, leading to endorsement of their intentions, or to steps to alter or halt what is proposed.

Accountability within an association works in both directions, in that being held to account reduces a member’s opportunities for denying the truth or avoiding taking action in the light of information received. Making people accountable does not tell decision-makers what to decide; it simply requires them to disclose what they want to bring about, and their reasoning. This helps raise trust within an organization.

Openness

Associations of environmental health professionals should encourage and foster openness in the management and decision-making processes. This can be built into the organization in the way in which decisions are made and policies are implemented. Openness is also important in dealing with external partners and other organizations, particularly when intersectoral or interprofessional issues are at stake, as the levels of trust in such matters are sometimes not optimal.

Autonomy and independence

Environmental health associations should operate as autonomous organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they should do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their autonomy.

Cooperation with other associations

Environmental health associations serve their members most effectively, and strengthen the environmental health movement, by working

together through local, national, regional and international structures. Environmental health professionals have a distinctive perspective on this, as intersectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation are important underlying concepts of environmental health.

Concern for community

While focusing on members' needs, environmental health associations should also work for the betterment of their communities, through policies accepted by their members. It is important that associations report to the public on the achievement of their objectives in the public interest. The public should also be kept informed of the nature and extent of the association's directives to its members about serving the public interest, and the nature and extent of what it does to ensure that its members meet acceptable standards of due diligence in the public interest. As an organization becomes larger, it may be necessary for it to consider the effect of its activities on the environment. For associations that have premises and a full-time staff and are major consumers of goods, services and energy, it may be necessary to develop corporate rules and housekeeping guidelines on best environmental practice.

The above principles are a guide. Nevertheless, it is important that they are not seen as merely something to aspire to, but are reflected throughout the organization.

FINANCES

It is self-evident that the financial wellbeing of an association is central to ensuring that it can pursue its mission. In developing systems for generating and managing financial resources, it is important that these activities do not become an end in themselves. Good financial governance not only ensures viability but also builds trust within the organization and with external partners. The general principles described earlier, such as accountability, have a particular resonance in dealing with the finances of any organization.

The "life history" of an environmental health association, and where it finds itself at certain points in its history, will influence

the form of financial governance exercised. The legal status of the association will in some cases determine the range of activities that it can engage in, and will impose legal requirements for financial controls. In some jurisdictions there are detailed legal requirements regulating the formation of nongovernmental organizations. Achieving designation as a non-profit organization may also entail compliance with a wide range of requirements, though many existing associations have found this to be a very worthwhile exercise. Those associations seeking such status need to give special attention to the elaboration of mission statements and the supervision of financial issues in order to retain this status.

Some associations that have been in existence for some time tend to gravitate towards developing commercial activities that combine initiatives in environmental health promotion with income generation. If an association decides to follow this route, special consideration should be given to the implications for its legal designation. In any event, expert legal and accounting opinions are essential. In the case of associations in the European Union, there are a number of issues currently before the European Commission that should be considered, dealing with the profit-making activities of non-governmental organizations.

Determining financial requirements

It may again seem self-evident that before an association can hope to attract financing it must formulate a vision of the activities it wishes to engage in, and then make some estimate of the cost of these activities. This can be initiated by short- and medium-term plans identifying the activities the association wishes to carry out in pursuance of its mission. This will then need to be balanced against available and potential resources, and reassessed accordingly. While it is certainly not possible to foresee all contingencies that may occur over a given time frame, putting some shape on the priority areas in the form of a plan will help in the strategic management of available resources should unforeseen issues arise. Maintaining cash flow is a major concern for all organizations, and can be a specific problem for newly formed or smaller ones. Careful planning in the elaboration and scheduling of activities will lessen the potential for difficulties to arise in executing them.

Case study 3. Development of a business plan for setting up a full-time secretariat

The Environmental Health Officers Association (Ireland) is currently engaged in developing a full-time secretariat for the running of the organization. Up to now, work had been done on a part-time voluntary basis by members. As part of this process, a business plan was developed to ensure the viability of the association, one of whose elements was to elaborate an operational plan for setting up the secretariat. The steps envisaged are as follows.

1. Review by accountancy and legal professionals of the business plan
2. Preliminary approval of the Association's Officer Board and Central Council of the business plan
3. Agreement on proposed operational procedures with clients and external trainers for pricing, ordering and invoicing
4. Final draft of the business plan
5. Extraordinary General Meeting of Association membership for approval
6. Nomination of directors
7. Appointment of auditors
8. Company formation, including copyrighting of name and logo
9. Opening of bank account
10. Registration for value added tax
11. Copyrighting of course materials and certificates
12. Acquisition of premises
13. Obtaining of insurance (public liability, travel, employers liability, fire and theft)
14. Recruitment of administrator
15. Registration for employer/employee income tax
16. Preparation of safety statement for office
17. Purchase of equipment and furniture
18. Office fitting and preparation
19. Official launch of company and opening of office
20. Board of Directors meeting – quarterly review of operation
21. Board of Directors meeting – six-monthly review of operation

Sources of income

Membership subscriptions

For some associations, members' subscriptions constitute the primary source of income, particularly during the formative stage. Setting the level of subscriptions requires careful consideration. While the amount levied should provide a sufficient income for the association, setting it at what is perceived to be too high will create problems. It is important that members feel they are getting value for money, in terms of what they perceive the association is achieving relative to their personal outlay. This is not easily achieved. As some activists in voluntary associations will testify, much of the efforts on behalf of members go unseen (or at least unnoticed). It is crucial

that members are kept informed of how their money is being used, and that formal procedures are put in place to facilitate this accountability.

It is not particularly useful to compare membership fees across the European Region, as salaries and living costs vary so widely. Comparing subscription fees nationally is a more valid exercise if the membership base and other sources of revenue are compared. Pitching membership fees at the most appropriate level is also important if there are other organizations that compete for a pool of potential members.

It may be possible to arrange for employers to pay membership fees on behalf of their staff as a condition of service, particularly if membership of the association confers a “licence to practise” in a given field of employment. Even where this is not possible, another consideration worth pursuing is to arrange for employers to deduct membership fees at source from members’ salaries over a given period, and to forward these to the association.

Covenants and gifts

In some countries it may be possible for associations to receive covenants and gifts from individuals and institutions. Making donations in this form attracts tax relief for the donor in some countries. It is advisable that associations establish procedures for receiving such donations, and that any implications under national law are considered. Some large multinational nongovernmental organizations encourage members and supporters to make covenants to them in their wills.

Conference services

A number of existing associations run successful conferences and seminars, which attract national and international audiences. Depending on the scale and lead time, this can entail a significant initial outlay of resources. Nevertheless, even for smaller organizations this has the benefit of being a potential source of income. Generating interest and media coverage of these events are important factors in marketing these conferences, and attention to the quality of the organization and presentations will help boost the reputation of an association.

Trade shows

These have proved useful in generating income in some existing associations. Trade shows are often run in conjunction with conferences and seminars. Providers of appropriate goods and services (usually from the private sector) are invited to hire space at the conference site to demonstrate and publicize their range. This can be of benefit to members as it gives them a “hands on” exposure to new equipment and services, with expert advice on hand. From the suppliers’ point of view it provides a captive audience of professionals with a specific interest in their line of products. Some companies are geared towards serving the international trade show circuit, and can provide the majority of facilities themselves to set up their exhibition.

Grants

Various forms of grant are another possible source of income. In particular, there are a range of European Union schemes that have given support to existing environmental health associations.

Grants may also be available from national governments to carry out specific projects to promote specific objectives. Developing lobbying skills to access these sources of income is a wise investment.

Training and publications

Developing, organizing and delivering training courses and packages is another possible source of revenue for environmental health associations. The fields of food safety, occupational health and safety, water and sanitation have proved to be successful areas for income generation. It should be emphasized that the development of these programmes was based on environmental health promotion needs rather than purely commercial considerations.

A range of books and videos developed by associations reach a wide audience and provide an important source of revenue. There may also be possibilities for associations to provide international consultancy services to other organizations and to aid agencies.

Job advertising

Selling advertising space in journals and magazines is an effective source of financing. This can be used to offset publishing costs, or

Case study 4. Accessing funding through international partnerships

One of the objectives of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme operated by the European Commission is "promoting equality of access to initial and continuing training for persons disadvantaged by socio-economic, geographical or ethnic factors". Exclusion is an endemic problem for the long-term unemployed and intervention is necessary to help them break out of this negative cycle.

The Environmental Health Officers Association (Ireland), the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (Northern Ireland Centre), the Bundesverband der Lebensmittelkontrolleure (Germany) and the Miljø & Helse (Teknisk Hygienisk Forum) (Norway) have developed a joint project, in conjunction with other partners, to make an innovative intervention in the cycle of exclusion. This is achieved by providing basic vocational training for the food/tourism sector combined with job-seeking skills accessible to the long-term unemployed. The project involves the training of 9 trainers and 60 trainees in the initial pilot phase, and will be followed by dissemination of training materials to at least 71 partnership community groups and at least 1700 environmental health/food hygiene professionals in the countries involved. Funding for the project was granted by the Leonardo da Vinci Programme following the submission of a joint project proposal from the partner organizations.

can be utilized in other areas of the association's work. One attractive form of advertising is to offer employers the opportunity to advertise employment vacancies in publications produced by the association. This benefits all parties. From the point of view of the readership, it increases the attraction of subscribing to the magazine, as it will be seen as a primary source of information on new jobs. Employers will see it as an effective way of reaching the target audience of professionals whom they wish to hire. For the association, it provides revenue and also creates a link between employers, members and the organization.

Financial controls

Developing financial controls in any organization is essential not only to ensure efficient and effective running, but also to ensure that abuse of financial powers is prevented or dealt with. In some countries there are stringent controls on the financial management of nongovernmental organizations, and these should be investigated fully in terms of setting down procedures for an environmental health association.

Financial procedures and delegation of duties

These procedures should ensure that there are protocols for receiving and receipting money, for expenditure and drawing up of contracts, and for banking and accounting procedures. For an association in its formative stages, one of the most important tasks is to identify the delegation of financial duties and to clearly set down the terms of office for those with that responsibility. Some associations deal with this by appointing a treasurer with overall responsibility for financial management.

It is essential to ensure accountability in the financial control of the association, and it is common practice to present the accounts to the membership during the course of annual general meetings at national and subnational levels.

The terms of reference for a treasurer should reflect the overall responsibility of the association to account to members for the financial dealings of the organization. The description below is an example of the terms of office that might be applied to the treasurer. Depending on the structure of the association, these duties might in turn be delegated to members with similar designation in regional or subnational branches.

The duties and responsibilities of a treasurer are to:

- keep full and correct accounts of the income and expenditure of the association;
- make such payments as may be authorized by the organization;
- prepare balance sheets and statements of income and expenditure for independent audit;
- secure and disburse finances in accordance with the rules of the association;
- report as required to the association on financial matters and produce the accounts as required; and
- hand over all accounts, books, property and papers to the association on ceasing to hold office.

Auditors

Provision for the auditing of accounts by independent third parties with recognized qualifications is a legal requirement in some countries.

This serves to protect both the members of the association, in that they can be assured that there are no irregularities in the management of their finances, and also those who operate in good faith and have responsibility for the financial concerns of the association. Even where such auditing is not required by law, it is nevertheless a prudent investment to acquire such services. Professional auditors provide not only the fundamental service of discovering existing problems, but can also be of assistance in highlighting areas of financial control where improvements are necessary in order to avoid future problems.

Liability for tax

This can potentially be a major liability for associations, particularly if they become involved in commercial ventures such as selling goods (magazines, books, videos, etc.) and services (training courses, consultancy, etc). Given the complexity of taxation legislation across the European Region, it is not within the remit of this book to deal in depth with this issue. Associations should seek expert legal and accounting advice on potential tax liability in respect of any activities, as the initial outlay on such services may be considerably less than a subsequent tax levy.

Avoiding vested interests

Organizations are built on trust, and when that trust is compromised it can cause serious damage. Members of an association need to feel that the honesty and integrity of those who have the stewardship of their organization is above reproach. An association therefore needs to establish principles and rules to ensure that individuals do not profit from the association over and above the legitimate expenses and/or salary that may be due to them.

While having protocols on handling cash can facilitate detecting outright misappropriation of funds, dealing with the avoidance of vested interests is more difficult. This requires developing procedures for the acquisition of goods and services and ensuring that these are monitored and complied with. It also involves developing a culture within the association, backed up by appropriate rules, that excludes the notion of personal financial gain from the activities of the association. The disclosure of any vested interests by members, particularly those with responsibility for financial matters, and their

exclusion from having any decision-making powers on issues where there is a conflict of interest should be enshrined in the rules and procedures of the association.

Insurance for liabilities

There is ample evidence that some of our societies are becoming more litigious. The law may require associations to have various forms of insurance to cover their activities. This insurance may include professional liability insurance to cover any professional actions or decisions. Public liability insurance may also be necessary to cover liability for damage, loss or injury to the public, and employer insurance may be necessary if the association has paid staff. Again, expert advice should be sought on the range of insurance needed and activities should be reviewed in order to minimize the association's liability.

Case study 5. Financial administration check list (15)

The following is a check list of questions that could be used to ensure that the most pertinent issues involved in financial administration of an association are considered.

1. When does the association's year begin and end (e.g. January–December or April–March)? Who prepares the end-of-year accounts? Who approves them? When must audit reports be forwarded to regulatory authorities?
2. Are summary accounts prepared? By whom? Who ensures that summary accounts are in accordance with full accounts? To whom are they sent?
3. Is an annual budget prepared? Who prepares it and who approves it?
4. Are interim management accounts prepared? By whom and how often? Are results compared with the budget? To whom are they reported?
5. Who receives and banks cash and cheques received? Who signs cheques? What limit is put on the size of cheque to be signed? Who reconciles cash books and bank statements and how often?
6. What is the machinery for accepting legacies and donations? Who supervises these decisions?
7. Who approves the appointment and removal of suppliers to the association? Who engages and dismisses staff or consultants? How are these reported?
8. Who can place orders on behalf of the association? Are these made in writing? What limits exist on personal authority in these matters?
9. Who accepts and approves invoices for payment?
10. Who decides on the insurance requirements of the association? To whom are these issues reported?
11. Are association records kept on computer and, if so, what back-up facilities are provided?
12. What arrangements are made for investing surplus funds?
13. Who audits the association's accounts? Are they paid or honorary positions? What qualifications do they possess? How are they appointed and reappointed? To whom do they report?

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND STRUCTURE

One of the primary tasks any group of professionals wishing to set up an association is to elaborate the internal legal framework that can support the long-term survival of the organization. This legal framework is meant both to secure the internal rules and regulations of the organization and to ensure that the external legal framework controlling such organizations is adhered to. As a first step, it is important to determine the laws or rules existing in a particular country or region that dictate the setting up of organizations. This will be particularly important in terms of the financial dealings of the association, as some countries have rules relating to the financial running and accountability of such organizations.

The range of external legal requirements pertaining across the European Region is very broad and does not come within the remit of this book. In the context of forming a new association, it is advisable to take expert legal opinion and to consult with other similar associations that may already exist. The following points may be used as a guide in considering what aspects of national law should be consulted:

- legal guarantees of freedom of speech and of assembly;
- rules governing the formation of associations and organizations;
- company law if applicable;
- registration as a nongovernmental organization if applicable;
- public accountability legislation;
- trading and supply of goods and services legislation;
- public, employer and professional liability legislation; and
- taxation legislation.

Drawing up a constitution

One of the first steps setting up such an association is to develop a written legal framework that sets out clearly what the purpose of the association is, whom it comprises and how it operates. This can be achieved by formulating a constitution, which deals in broad terms with all aspects of the association and can form the basis of more detailed rules and standing orders. In a number of jurisdictions it is mandatory to develop such a document, as this constitutes the formal bond of association.

The constitution might, for example:

- define the objectives of the association (this could refer to benefiting the public through the promotion of environmental health, and improving the professional standards of environmental health professionals);
- define the power of the association to purchase or lease property, equipment, goods or services; borrow, raise or accept money in accordance with the objectives of the association; establish training and educational courses and facilities; remunerate persons in good faith for services rendered; and petition government on matters of public interest;
- underline the non-profit nature of the association and the principle that no individual member should profit by the activities of the association, save where provided for by virtue of services rendered;
- describe the organizational structure and the reporting relationship of elected officers of the association;
- set out principles for accepting members, and principles to be adhered to by members;
- provide for the making and amendment of rules and standing orders for meetings and other activities; and
- provide for the dissolution of the association.

Organizational structure

The size and geographical spread of members will have a large influence on the organizational structure. There are wide differences in the number of members in existing associations across the European Region, from just over 100 to in excess of 8500. Some organizations have adopted a structure that works at regional as well as national level. The following indicates existing structures in some environmental health associations.

General or central council

This is a governing body made up of an agreed number of members who have been appointed by the general membership of the

association. These representatives are charged with managing the affairs of the association, and their term of office on these central or general councils is stipulated.

This body in turn is run by a group of officers who fill the posts of Chairperson/President, Deputy Chairperson/President (if required), Secretary, Treasurer and Public Relations Officer (if required). These officers should be given a clear remit of their duties and the limitations of their powers and responsibilities. The appointment of such officers can be by the membership of the association generally or by the members of the general or central council.

Standing committees

As environmental health associations have a wide range of issues to deal with, it may be appropriate that power of delegation is provided for so that committees or subgroups can be formed to work on certain tasks. The terms of reference for these committees should be set down and procedural arrangements for their working and reporting elaborated.

Regional branches

It can be clumsy for an association with members spread over a wide geographical area to meet regularly, and the cost can be prohibitive. Some associations have therefore set up regional branches or groups that allow for the association to work at a more effective level. In some cases, organizations have set up vocational branches that bring together members involved in similar jobs.

Where regional branches are formed its important to have clearly defined channels so that representations can be taken from regional to national level, and also that there is two-way reporting and accountability. It is also crucial that there are provisions for making financial resources available to branches and for building in accountability for such financial independence.

Evolving the structure

From studies of existing associations of environmental health professionals, it is apparent that they develop along different lines at different rates. There are some associations that have full-time staff, permanent offices and a wide range of commercial activities. There

Case study 6. Examples of committees set up by organizations at central or general council level

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (United Kingdom)	Environmental Health Officers Association (Ireland)	National Environmental Health Association (United States)	Swedish Environmental Health Officers' Association
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and General Health Committee • Environmental Protection Committee • Occupational Health and Safety Committee • Housing Committee • Education and Membership Committee • Resources Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference Committee • Editorial Committee • Education and Examination Committee • Finance and General Purposes Committee • Legal and Parliamentary Committee • Public Relations Committee • Resources and Development Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air/Land/Water, Environmental Health Management • Food Protection • General Environmental Health • Injury Prevention/ Occupational Health • Institutional Environmental Health • Hazardous and Toxic Substances • On-Site Wastewater Management • International Environmental Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment and Health Management • Food Hygiene • Nature Protection • Third World Aid

are many associations that operate on a totally voluntary basis, with little or no facilities, and a small group of people dedicating large amounts of personal time. There is also a sense that there are other fledgling associations struggling to take the first steps in being fully operational.

While some organizations may aspire to having full-time staff and offices, it is clear that this is not absolutely necessary to be a successful organization. It is possible to have a very vibrant association with very little in terms of material resources; in such cases it is the enthusiasm and application that members bring to the association that can overcome financial constraints. In the final analysis, associations will enhance their prospects of success if they adopt a structure that reflects their needs and resources rather than adopting inappropriate models from other associations or countries.

Articles of association, statutes and by-laws

These terms detail the broad rules for running the association and can cover a wide range of issues.

Membership

Rules that may set out types of membership and requirements of membership of the association, and outline the process for applying and assessing applications for membership, may cover:

- mutual recognition of members of other associations;
- setting fees and membership subscriptions; and
- setting standards of conduct for members and processes for removing members from the association, with disciplinary procedures and appeal processes.

Election of officers and appointments

These rules should set out who the elected officers of the association will be, their designated titles, their responsibilities and their terms of office. They could also deal with how elections are to take place and how elections will be decided (i.e. majority or qualified votes). The rights and privileges of these officers and the ground rules for removal from office should also be specified.

Accounts and auditors

Clear rules should be in place to deal with the kinds of financial accounts to be kept and the reporting of these to members. Rules should also be in place to deal with the inspection of accounts, both by members and by regulatory bodies. Some jurisdictions require external auditing of financial records; this is good practice even if not a legal necessity.

Establishing regional branches and other committees

It is necessary to provide a mechanism whereby regional branches can be established at the instigation either of the governing body or of the general membership. The election of representatives to the regional branches and their reporting to the central level of the association should also be prescribed. As mentioned earlier, rules covering the finances of such regional bodies and other committees should be provided.

Meetings

One of the most fundamental activities of any association is the holding of meetings. Rules for calling and running such meetings are central to the smooth running of any association. The issues that need to be dealt with in the rules include the kinds of meeting that can be called (such as annual and extraordinary general meetings), notices of meetings, quorums, chairing, voting and adjournment.

Procedural rules

The running of an organization can be made a good deal more effective and efficient if sensible standing orders are developed. Procedural rules are particularly useful in terms of organizing meetings and in setting the procedures by which matters can be discussed. Procedural rules also have an essential role in ensuring that financial procedures are clearly laid down along with practices that reflect accountability and openness, as part of the day-to-day running of the association.

MANAGEMENT OF THE MEMBERSHIP

The management of membership issues is a vital consideration in the running of an association of environmental health professionals. Membership criteria are addressed in Chapter 2.

It is important that resources are made available for processing and verifying the qualifications of applicants for membership. To facilitate this there should be procedures and channels of communication for applications, and a process for making a decision on the acceptance or otherwise of applicants. As a general guideline, there are no compelling reasons for limiting the number of members, although an expanding membership does put additional demands on the resources of an association, notwithstanding the potential increase in revenue from subscriptions.

Some existing associations provide for individual, corporate, student and honorary membership (13).

All members, regardless of the type of membership, should receive the benefits and entitlements due to them from the association,

and details of these should be available to them before joining. The management of membership data, especially that of a confidential nature, requires particular consideration (see Chapter 5).

4

The Functions of Associations of Environmental Health Professionals

The relative age of the organization is just one of the factors that will influence the functions that an association may wish to undertake. Another factor is the existing framework of environmental health legislation. Nongovernmental organizations operating in jurisdictions with well established and strictly enforced environmental health legislation will have different priorities than those within new democracies, where economies are in transition and legislative frameworks may require reform. As other developments take place in society, the mission and functions of the organization can develop accordingly. The first reason for creating an association is often the perceived need of environmental health professionals to help each other resolve existing environmental problems. Initially, it is possible to share personal experiences and knowledge between small groups. As such informal groups become aware of the variety of issues that influence their performance, they may seek a more structured organization. The activities and functions of this organization can evolve, depending on the quality and ambitions of the members of the group.

In Chapter 1, the areas proposed for developing a mission are stated to include:

- advocating the concepts of environmental health and integrating the needs of members with the benefits to the wider community;
- promoting the development of environmental health services;

- setting standards of excellence for environmental health professionals; and
- promoting the status of environmental health professionals.

To fulfil those areas, environmental health associations could engage in a wide range of functions.

SUPPORT TO THE MEMBERSHIP

For an association of kindred professionals to thrive, it should be seen to be beneficial to its members. The manner in which this benefit is derived will vary with the perception of individual members. It is worth noting that a number of associations began their existence by being primarily involved in developing the status and working conditions of their members. While not operating as trade unions, they maintained and continue to maintain close relationships with trade unions without encroaching on the union's area of responsibility. This has been the case even though some professionals may be members of both organizations.

While an association of environmental health professionals should not be considered solely as a trade union, which protects labour rights, it can be directly linked with improving the status of members through professional development. In some circumstances it may also have a role in making members more attractive in the labour market. The specific functions that a newly formed association may wish to consider in this area include:

- recruiting members and canvassing potential members;
- bringing members together to share views, resolve differences and make decisions on the future of their profession (this can be achieved through workshops, meetings, conferences and seminars);
- representing the views of members and the policy of the association to external bodies, including government and the wider public; and
- supporting members by conducting the business of the association in a manner that reflects well the image of the members and the regard in which they are held outside the organization.

Some associations have developed a comprehensive range of functions in this area, as illustrated by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (Case study 7). It should be borne in mind that this organization has existed for over a century.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

This function not only ensures effective internal communication and information but also establishes the credibility of the organization with the outside world. As well as being able to exchange personal experiences and knowledge, members need to be informed of current best practices. This can be achieved through the publication of papers, bulletins, brochures and magazines, and through the scientific literature. It can also be achieved by organizing discussions and guest lectures by members of different organizations that have a role in the field of environmental protection and health. These activities can be targeted at members as well as the general public.

Public debate can be stimulated to voice concern about environmental health problems. In adopting such an approach, it is important to do so in a balanced way by articulating these issues in a professional manner. Such an approach should seek not only to raise awareness of the problems but also to guide stakeholders on their role in finding the best solution. One aspect of this function is the education of the public and specific target groups. Environmental

Case study 7. Membership services provided by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

The following services are available to the members:

- 24-hour legal and stress helpline
- low-cost legal services
- up to 45% discount on medical insurance cover
- CIEH monthly journal *Environmental health*
- CIEH weekly news bulletin *Environmental health news*
- preferential rates on professional indemnity insurance
- professional assistance on technical enquiries
- discount on seminars and the CIEH Annual Congress
- financial services including loans, Visa card, mortgages, priority hotel reservation scheme, household insurance scheme, motor accident assistance and personal insurance plan.

health professionals need good partners. The public should be assisted in developing higher levels of understanding and awareness of environmental problems and health risks. Engaging the public as partners, and educating them in the principles of caring for health and the environment, could be part of the mission of the organization.

Some of the specific functions that a newly formed association might consider include the following.

- Possibilities for internal communication in the organization can be developed through regular discussion and exchange of information. This can be achieved through newsletters, magazines, journals or the electronic media. It can also be facilitated through meetings, workshops, training courses and seminars.
- Members can be given information on the running of the association and on decisions and policies, and can be actively involved in developing those decisions and policies.
- Members can be supported in communicating with external bodies. This can be achieved by appointing persons to articulate the association's viewpoint and supporting them in that role.

FORMATIVE EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Some associations are involved in ensuring the educational and professional development of their members. This can take the form of organizing, certifying and accrediting the formative training for potential members. This ensures that new members have been exposed to agreed standards of education and that these standards are recognized as reflecting best current practice. Their level of competence, and by extension their right of entry to the organization, can be substantiated by examinations, certification or practical demonstration. This approach guarantees that an organization can ensure the continuation of expertise within its membership. There are benefits to society as a whole from this approach, as it guarantees a higher level of service. This approach requires close collaboration with the education sector, and government support may be necessary if the route of formal accreditation is followed.

Setting minimum educational requirements is only one element of this picture, in terms of having a role in formative education. Some associations are actively engaged with universities in developing courses that will lead to eligibility as members, and are involved in all levels of curriculum development and assessment of courses. In some cases associations certify these courses as having reached a standard appropriate to the standing of the profession, and can thereby play a strong role in ensuring the continued excellence of university courses. In other cases the professional organizations act as advisory bodies to universities, particularly in terms of keeping them abreast of development in the professional field and advising them on where improvement or amendments are needed in educational programmes.

Given the applied nature of much of the work of environmental health professionals, some professional associations are particularly involved in the practical training of students. This is achieved through the development of sandwich courses with universities, whereby the professional association organizes periods of guided immersion in professional practice. It is through initiatives such as this that professional associations can build the sense of belonging and pride in professionals, as well as having a proactive role in ensuring that the minimum educational requirements have real substance. In some countries there has been a move towards making levels of membership commensurate with a combination of academic qualifications and work experience.

Facilitating ongoing professional development for members through training courses and postgraduate study and research is another important function to be considered. By working with educational institutions or through its own resources, an association can develop relevant courses for members, and if possible support them by making resources available to members to follow these courses. Continuing professional development is dealt with in Chapter 6.

For new associations, many of the above initiatives would be very difficult to pursue during the formative stages, and particular conditions in a country might dictate that such a path is not appropriate. Where members are drawn from a range of professionals, there may be other difficulties in influencing formative training of members. If

a newly formed association wishes to take on functions in this area, the following are some of the possibilities that might initially be considered.

- Liase with educational authorities on current standards of formative education and identify mutual priorities.
- Lobby for the development of studies on national environmental health status and on educational programmes to meet national needs.
- Offer input to educational authorities on the development of formative educational programmes for environmental health professionals.
- Support educational programmes by, for example, providing educational and case study materials or arranging exchange/site visits.
- Provide feedback to educational authorities on the educational and training needs of environmental health professionals.

Case study 8. Examples of the involvement of associations in formative training

Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (12)	National Environmental Health Association (United States) (11)
<p>The Institute is responsible, in Scotland, for the training of Environmental Health Officers and of Meat Inspectors. The training of the former is based on the degree courses at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Strathclyde, which give students four years of theoretical study. Practical training is under the control of the Institute and is undertaken in local authorities throughout Scotland.</p>	<p>NEHA sponsors eight credentials.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian 2. Certified Environmental Health Technician 3. Registered Hazardous Substances Professional 4. Registered Hazardous Substances Specialist 5. Registered Environmental Technician 6. Certified Food Safety Professional 7. Radon Measurement Proficiency Credential 8. Radon Mitigation Proficiency Credential

NETWORKING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

As an association develops, the possibility of creating effective networks with external partners is an important consideration. Environmental health is a field that requires integrated management of activities and coordination between all interests. It is necessary to ensure sufficient expertise in order that mistakes and miscommunication do not arise. It provides good possibilities for contact between members and between similar national and international organizations. The exchange of innovations will make the work easier, especially if the organization is open and actively searching for new contacts. This will also facilitate the inclusion of the organization as a member in international federations of professionals for environment and health.

Developing networks between associations can also be an important way of promoting research and lobbying at national and international level on matters of mutual concern. The specific functions that a newly formed association may wish to consider in this area include:

- developing or identifying a register of governmental, nongovernmental and voluntary agency contacts engaged in environmental health matters at national and subnational levels;
- disseminating information to such bodies on the work of the association;
- identifying key partners and key areas for collaboration;
- developing systems for information exchange with external partners; and
- exploring possibilities for partnership funding on common projects with funding agencies.

INFLUENCING AND LOBBYING

The credibility and influence of an association may be gauged by its ability to shape opinion and lobby for change. To pursue this function, it is essential to work with external parties. While national policies define one aspect of how society develops, the manner in which this policy and legislation are implemented is also important. Sometimes the good

intentions that lead to legislation being enacted are not followed through in its implementation. Environmental health professionals having the necessary knowledge and understanding of theory and application often encounter inconsistencies between those theories and their implementation. When such situations are encountered, environmental health professionals can provide a balanced and informed perspective on how the shortfall between intention and implementation can be bridged.

In this regard they have a legitimate motive in lobbying for change. Influencing law- and policy-makers at the policy development stage is an effective way of ensuring that laws are enacted in a timely manner. To achieve this, the organization can lobby different ministries and institutions. Lobbying at supranational level (for instance of the European Commission) is also carried out by some organizations. The international dimension to lobbying is becoming increasingly important, as is the development of links with other environmental health associations in lobbying together on common concerns.

The organization can be a strong voice in developing and promoting national environmental health initiatives. Members of environmental health associations have a unique perspective on the problems and their possible solutions. It is also important to support local authorities in the creation and implementation of local environmental policies. Preparing codes for waste management and for the protection of air, water and soil are of great value to municipal environmental experts. Initiating, preparing and contributing to such initiatives adds to the credibility of the organization. The competent preparation of these documents also contributes to better environmental management and a reduction in health risk. All of this the organization has to strive for through its own abilities, not through dependence on outside bodies. The specific functions that a new association may wish to consider in this area include:

- developing policies on national and international issues;
- preparing submissions on government policies and on proposed legislation;
- developing networks and contacts in government departments and other non-statutory bodies; and
- stimulating and contribution to public debate through such means as the mass media.

ETHICS

Environmental health associations have an important balancing role in society. On the one hand they are nongovernmental organizations. On the other, the members are professionals and often work for a municipality, national government or the private sector. This can create a role for them as mediator between the players in the field of the environment.

The organization can uphold the principles of environmental health as well as promoting those concepts to the public. It is important to establish the authority of the organization, not only through relations with other partners but also internally through each member. In this way the organization is responsible for establishing specific professional ethics, which help strengthen the civil society and protect the interests of the public for a better environment. Often the ethical code of the organization is a symbol of this understanding, which then increases the role and authority of the organization in society. The specific functions that an association of environmental health professionals may wish to consider includes:

- developing a code of conduct for individual members that they commit themselves to in their work as environmental health professionals;
- developing a code of ethics for the association for the manner in which it conducts its business (this could cover such topics as how and why it lobbies on issues, how it shares information with the public, and how it conducts business with its members); and
- developing a code of deontology (the study of moral necessity, duty or obligation) for the profession(s) that constitute its membership.

RESEARCH

The development of research activities is an area where associations of environmental health professionals can make a valuable

**Case study 9. Code of ethics developed by the
Swedish Environmental Health Officers' Association (10)**

1. An Environmental Health Officer shall work to improve environment and health out of an ecological, humanitarian and democratic viewpoint.
2. An Environmental Health Officer shall work objectively on the basis of environment and health legislation. He/she shall maintain a high competence within the field of environment and health protection.
3. An Environmental Health Officer shall apply a holistic view within his/her field of competence and work.
4. An Environmental Health Officer shall maintain his/her integrity towards other interests.
5. An Environmental Health Officer shall be engaged in and take a stand on different environmental health issues and contribute towards an open and objective debate in society.
6. An Environmental Health Officer should support a colleague who has problems when practising this Code of Ethics.

contribution to the society they serve. In some countries there has been a slowdown in research owing to difficult economic circumstances, yet the need for reliable research into environmental health issues grows all the time. As new threats to health status emerge (such as the problems posed by social disorder and exclusion) and more long-term problems remain unresolved (such as provision of safe drinking-water to the 100 million people in the European Region (8)) this need for research cannot currently be met.

Some associations encourage research by offering bursaries and grants to members to engage in small-scale research, or have some full-time staff dealing with research issues. For a newly formed association this involvement can be a heavy burden on resources, but is none the less a very worthwhile function. While funding large-scale research is expensive, the critical mass that an association provides may be used to source funding for research from funding agencies, and to support members engaged in research.

Some of the specific research functions that a new association may wish to pursue include:

- identifying priority areas where research is necessary and lobbying for research to be developed in those areas;
- identifying funding sources at national and international level;

- elaborating research proposals for submission to funding agencies; and
- facilitating members and external partners in their research activities through, for example, funding, provision of facilities or services, or registers of experts.

5

Information and Communication

Information is one of the essential resources that an association of environmental health professionals will have to manage. It is therefore important that systems for managing this resource are developed and utilized for the benefit of the association. It is also important to ensure that safeguards are in place to ensure the resource is not abused. As one of the biggest problems for individuals is trying to keep abreast of the information that comes their way on a daily basis, a well focused professional association can provide valuable assistance to members, outside partners and contacts in dealing with this volume of information. The way in which an association communicates, both with its members and with other partners, will have a profound effect on the association and how it is perceived internally and externally.

TYPES OF INFORMATION

Record of association activities

The official recording of association activities is crucial for a number of reasons. If the association is to be both accountable and open, it is essential that its dealings be recorded and – just as importantly – disseminated to the members. Keeping accurate minutes of meetings, recording correspondence and reporting decisions are all central to the process of proper information management. Minutes should be made of all meetings, and this task can be clearly delegated to

one person before a meeting commences. Where follow-up meetings take place, the minutes from the previous meeting can be available in advance, and there can be an opportunity to discuss and amend them and to agree that they are a fair and accurate account. While much of this may seem basic, it is useful to restate these fundamental tenets as members will treat any deviance from such norms with suspicion.

It is equally important to record other activities such as seminars and conferences, and to have available written records of any papers or lectures delivered. These can be circulated to members who were unable to attend, or can be used as publicity for forthcoming events.

It is also important to provide a forum for members to share their experience and knowledge with others and to provide a record of that activity. This ensures that the lessons of the past are not lost for the professionals of the future. It is a salutary experience to read accounts of experience going back several generations, and to realize how some issues appear to have changed little while others have developed beyond all recognition. Appointing archivists (even on a voluntary basis) to do this work on behalf of the association can be one approach to ensuring that records are not just made but are also retained. There is often some publicity value to be gained from having such material when an association reaches a particular milestone in its history.

Membership details

Having up-to-date membership details is essential to the smooth running of an association and to ensure that subscriptions and mailing lists are also up-to-date. They may also be necessary for insurance purposes if there are claims against the association for injury or loss during association activities. Some associations provide voting rights to members on the basis of membership fees being paid, so this information is important to have in a readily accessible manner. Some associations ensure that the list of paid-up members is available at annual general meetings and other meetings where it is anticipated that issues may be voted on.

Membership details are also useful to outside partners and the public in terms of providing contact names and addresses for members. Some associations publish this information in diaries and other

publications. There are also examples where associations swap this information with other associations for publication in their respective literature. Associations also have a duty to protect the privacy of some details relating to their members. In some countries this may be underpinned by national data protection legislation. This may restrict the access of third parties to some membership details, unless the consent of the persons concerned is forthcoming. It is important, in any event, for an association to check the legal situation on such matters.

Lists of experts

When environmental health professionals encounter a particular issue in their work that requires prompt action and an informed decision, it is always useful to be able to call on the expertise of colleagues who have dealt with similar situations in the past. Unfortunately, it is often difficult for individuals to access this kind of information quickly, and it is even more difficult for them to develop a list of contacts that can assist them with an unforeseen eventuality. An environmental health association can provide an important service by acting as an information resource for such issues. Developing and disseminating lists of experts in particular fields, both within the association and from external sources, is of immense benefit to members. Similarly, dissemination of relevant papers or documents from such experts is also useful. This approach can be further developed by having on-line expertise available, either through phone or Internet contact, or by setting up electronic discussion groups. Some organizations also provide other kinds of expertise such as counselling and legal services to members.

Reference books and materials

Up-to-date library and reference facilities are a useful component of any information system for a professional association. They also involve a considerable commitment of resources. The problem most associations have to grapple with is how to make reference material available to members who are not within easy travelling distance of the library. A number of solutions may be considered. If information is available in electronic form, and members have means of access to this format, then setting up a Web site or an e-mail contact address can be considered. This can also be used to send out updates of recently acquired material.

Information on current developments

Associations can undertake to provide comprehensive, well structured and swift information on current scientific and regulatory developments, access to databases (including international databases), reference contact points, etc.

Technical codes of practice and technical guidance notes

By developing codes of practice and guidance notes for their members, associations of environmental health professionals can contribute to the creation of a professional community with accepted common objectives, and the willingness to have an integrated approach to environmental health issues. Such codes can contribute to building up the identity of environmental health professionals, and are useful in promoting environmental health concepts on an intersectoral basis.

DEVELOPING AN INFORMATION SYSTEM

There are four elements to the management of information, namely its collection, handling, storage and dissemination. Each of these elements can be integrated so that there is continuity and consistency. The appointment of members to positions that deal specifically with information transfer is one strategy towards achieving this continuity and consistency. The appointment of an association secretary at national level, with counterparts at subnational level, provides a network through which information can flow from national to local level and vice-versa. These focal points can take responsibility for notifying and recording meetings, dealing with correspondence and disseminating information. A similar network for the flow of financial information might also be developed through an association treasurer and a network of subnational treasurers, if deemed appropriate.

Where it is appropriate to appoint persons to deal with public relations, they can facilitate communication with the mass media. Where such an appointment is made, it is important to set up clear guidelines on how the press should be dealt with, and a system for clearing public statements can be put in place.

One benefit of establishing a clear information management system is that members will know how, and from whom, they can access information. There will also be a clearly defined route for them to input information into the organization. It also ensures that outside bodies can be helped in communicating effectively with the association.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

It is inevitable that any association will accumulate a substantial amount of information in a short period of time. While this information can be managed with great efficiency, one of the hallmarks of an “open” association is the accessibility of that information to the members. A problem that traditionally arises for associations is the perception that there are problems with information flow, and how the information is being used by individuals in pursuit of personal aims. If associations develop a proactive approach to making their information accessible, this can go a long way towards avoiding conflict. Access to documentation is a basic element of such a process. Developing up-to-date circulation lists, ensuring that information is disseminated in a timely fashion, and holding regular briefings on activities are imperatives for any successful organization.

This could include access by members to any documentation that relates to them personally. In some jurisdictions there is specific legislation dealing with access to this information, and this can be built into any association’s information management system.

Documentation relating to the association’s financial affairs, minutes of meetings and correspondence may also require to be accessible to members. In any event, it is prudent for an environmental health association to work on the basis that all documentation is available to the members unless there are compelling reasons not to make it so. Such reasons might involve commercial confidentiality, or personal matters not of direct concern to the association. It is advisable that any exemptions to making information available are stipulated in the rules of the association, and that there are mechanisms for requesting information and appealing any decision not to make information available.

COMMUNICATION

While having and disseminating information is an important function, it is also crucial that any organization develops effective communication. An association of environmental health professionals has two main concerns with regard to communication: how to communicate effectively internally with its members, and how to communicate with external bodies and individuals.

Internal communication

Internal communication is a key element for environmental health professionals in order to feel that they possess common objectives and knowledge. Professionals can continuously improve the quality of their work, thus consolidating their credibility, by exchanging experiences, receiving timely and appropriate information on professional matters, and working together on environmental health issues. Associations have a role in providing such information and communication tools to environmental health professionals, so that they can share their experiences and expertise.

APPLICATION OF APPROPRIATE MEANS OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Newsletters and journals

These are an efficient means of establishing concrete links between environmental health professionals. A regular newsletter or a journal is indicative of the vitality of the association, and provides a distinct identity for the association and its members. Among other things, a newsletter can be used to communicate:

- general information and news on current environmental health issues;
- contributions and articles by members and non-members;
- suggestions/methods in relation to professional practice;
- surveys, assessments and reports;
- question-and-answer items; and
- a diary of events.

Diaries and lists of contacts

An important function of associations is to put environmental health professionals in direct contact with each other or with those who can help and support them. Environmental health professionals are usually keen to receive detailed information on their colleagues and counterparts, be it the form of:

- a social diary of members, containing membership details;
- records of the activities of the association and its members;
- directories of institutions; or
- lists of experts and contacts.

Conferences, meetings and seminars

Other means of internal communication for associations include organizing conferences and meetings on various topics and organizing training sessions, which can be an opportunity to pass on various messages.

Electronic communication tools

Several European countries have set up internal electronic communication systems aiming at networking environmental health professionals. These systems may be open to other groups, while in other cases they are accessible only to some of the professionals working in the field of environmental health.

Most of these systems are based on three main functions.

1. Electronic mail (e-mail) allows direct and quick contact, with possibilities of exchanging electronic documents and sending the same message to many people within a few seconds. The potential uses of e-mail for environmental health professionals include:
 - exchange of experience
 - summarized update of new regulations
 - information on regulatory projects
 - dissemination of urgent hazard warnings
 - question-and-answer processes involving “all” users.
2. Forums and on-line chat allow several people to engage in an “electronic debate” on specific topics. These debates can be

“moderated” (i.e. contributions can be validated by a moderator prior to being made available to the forum). This form of conference can save a lot of unnecessary travel. Further, it does not oblige all participants to be connected at the same time: one can react to a contribution posted the day before.

3. An Intranet allows users quick access to comprehensive yet well structured data. An Intranet is a “private” Internet, which means that confidential information can be displayed on the system without being accessible to non-registered users. Intranet sites are really useful only if users (i.e. environmental health professionals) “feed” the system regularly with updated information and with their experience. Such systems are sustainable if they stay “alive”, which means that environmental health professionals take ownership of them and are willing to contribute to their relevance.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Clearly, the holistic concept of environmental health may only become reality when it is known and accepted by the “outside world”, beyond the tight group of environmental health professionals. Associations therefore have a clear role in communicating and establishing close links with all the stakeholders concerned. That said, there will be times when confidential or sensitive information will have to be kept within an association. Clear guidelines should be developed so that there is no confusion over what issues can be communicated externally.

External target audiences

It is important that associations identify the relevant stakeholders and direct their communication accordingly, since efficient communication cannot be directed at all target audiences simultaneously and the dominant message will vary depending on the target audience.

Partners

Direct partners, such as ministries of health or of the environment, local authorities, other environmental health and professional associations

Case study 10. Examples of communication activities by existing associations of environmental health professionals

Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (12)	A bimonthly journal, <i>Environmental health Scotland</i> , is published and a report on environmental health in Scotland is prepared annually.
	Through its Public Relations Officer, the Institute issues statements to ensure that matters relating to environmental health are brought to the attention of the public.
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) (13)	The Publishing and Communications Division of the Chartered Institute aims to provide the environmental health professional with that most valuable commodity – information.
	Publishing three magazines, four specialized bulletins and over one hundred books, videos and training manuals on environmental health per year, the range is exhaustive, catering for students new to the profession, or detailed technical papers for the senior environmental health professional.
Swedish Environmental Health Officers' Association (10)	SEHOA publishes a journal, <i>Miljö och hälsa (Environment and health)</i> , 10 times a year.
Bundesverband der Lebensmittelkontrolleure (Germany)	A quarterly members' magazine is issued and training courses in food hygiene and continuing education are also offered for all interested parties.
	Conferences with exhibitions and hygiene courses have been organized, information material published and sold, and cooperation in research and development effected with industry in the hygiene sector.
Environmental Health Officers Association (Ireland)	A biennial summer school and joint conference with CIEH (Northern Ireland Centre) are organized.
	A yearbook, mainly consisting of research articles, is also published.
National Environmental Health Association (United States) (11)	NEHA conducts an Annual Educational Conference and a number of technical workshops. It publishes the widely respected and peer-reviewed <i>Journal of environmental health</i> and <i>Environmental news digest</i> , and provides additional services ranging from networking to the development of positions on timely and serious environmental concerns.

and nongovernmental organizations, will be interested in discussing common interests. Targeting them can also be an opportunity to provide them with information on the relevance of the association and the value of the expertise of environmental health professionals.

Indirect professional partners (other ministries, research centres, etc.) can also benefit from communication with associations.

Parliamentarians and political decision-makers are also important partners. Pressed by their electorate to improve the state of environmental health, they are often looking for a global concept that would fit these demands and need experts to suggest solutions or simply state the situation fairly.

The scientific community

Scientists are also actors in environmental health. Their expertise complements the activities of environmental health professionals, while they themselves can benefit from the experience of environmental health professionals in their research.

The media

Environmental health is an item of growing importance in the news. However, as journalists must meet tight deadlines and write to attract the attention of their readership, their slant on issues is not always as objective and balanced as environmental health professionals would like it to be. Associations of environmental health professionals can help to fill the gap of objectivity. On the other hand, media with whom trust has been established can be reliable collaborators in relaying educational campaigns or appropriate messages in case of emergencies.

The international perspective

Environmental health associations can also engage in active communication at the international level. Lobbying and communication at this level would be useful in ensuring that the actions of various environmental health associations are consistent, and perhaps coordinated by an international federation of associations.

Communication at international level is also an opportunity to promote the expertise of environmental health professionals, which

can be useful to international organizations in various missions such as the development of policies, programmes and field operations. Communication with other countries can also foster an exchange of experiences and services between environmental health professionals of different cultures, and constitute an excellent basis for cooperation.

Issues for communication with external partners

Promoting environmental health

Within the various WHO definitions of environmental health, the promotion of an integrated approach is one of the key principles (16). Although this principle has now been elaborated for a number of years, the concept has not been fully integrated into environmental health services.

In some situations health professionals have concentrated more on treating diseases rather than on health (including “wellbeing” in the sense of the WHO definition). With the emergence of diseases linked to lifestyles, the priority is again on prevention, as espoused by WHO (8). Associations of environmental health professionals, as promoters of a holistic and “horizontal” approach to work, can keep these professionals reminded of the benefits of integrating this approach by initiating and participating in intersectoral initiatives.

Policy-makers, who may not have a grounding in environmental health, may take advice from a variety of sources without receiving the integrated overview that the environmental health approach can provide. Nevertheless, if they are appropriately lobbied or briefed they can be receptive to a global approach. They can play a decisive role in promoting intersectoral work and integrating both elements into their decisions. Associations can make efforts to promote environmental health with these actors. Clearly, this means being able to transform complex and uncertain information into clear and accessible messages that can be used directly by non-specialists.

At the level of supranational organizations, the environmental health approach is not always reflected in policies or structures. There is thus an important challenge for associations of environmental health professionals to improve their communication and influence

at this level. Obviously, these efforts would be more likely to be credible if they were borne by a federation or group of European associations.

Promoting environmental health should incorporate actual benefits for the target audience. Useful information for this purpose can include:

- explaining the historical development of environmental health;
- outlining current applications of this concept and the visible benefits of these existing experiences; and
- being able to show/calculate the social and economic benefits of the environmental health approach for situations with which the target audience is confronted.

Contributing to the current debate

Environmental health professionals can bring a global vision of environmental health issues to their work. This vision encompasses the emerging awareness of the multiplicity of actors dealing with societal issues, as symbolized by the emerging concept of “good governance”. As discussed previously (2), the terms “governance” and “government” are sometimes confused. Governments alone cannot deal with all issues in society. The approach put forward by the concept of “good governance” is to ask how the various institutions and interest groups in society can work together to resolve such issues. This approach thus goes far beyond consideration of the role of the government institutions themselves, and fosters a necessary societal debate to clarify the role of each actor.

Within this debate, professional associations have a clear mission to be the voice of environmental health professionals. They can put across their concept of environmental health, but also participate in clarifying roles and eventually suggest an evolution of structures to facilitate effective cooperation.

Promoting the expertise of environmental health professionals

A high degree of expertise has been developed among the cadre of environmental health professionals that is worthy of being shared with other professionals nationally and internationally. Associations

of environmental health professionals can promote the expertise of their members to potential employers. By doing so, they also promote environmental health concepts to a wider target audience.

Advocacy and representation on important issues

In representing their members, professional associations can promote their corporate position on particular subjects. They can thus try to influence the design of policies, either at national or international level. On certain key topics, it may be worth organizing a regular communiqué to decision-makers, in order for environmental health professionals to assert their presence and explain their opinion in this domain. Associations may use their network to follow up on the implementation of policies by professionals, and regularly inform their members on progress and difficulties. They thus contribute to reinforcing the role of professionals in policy implementation. Environmental health professionals have the advantage of being able to provide decision-makers with an “intelligent” assessment of the situation, linking knowledge of policies, scientific aspects and everyday application.

Responding to crises

When crises occur, associations of environmental health professionals can have an important role in supporting environmental health professionals in their efforts to quickly provide important information. By communicating actively and professionally during crises on behalf of their members, associations can assert the credibility of environmental health professionals.

Risk communication is a sensitive exercise for every environmental health professional since it requires a good knowledge of the situation, high communication skills and an appropriate attitude. It is even more sensitive for associations, since they act in the name of the whole profession and, in this type of situation, their credibility can be enhanced or damaged.

Reporting on association activities

As outlined earlier, associations help environmental health professionals feel that they “belong to a group with the same objectives”. It is useful that the outside world is made aware that the strength and worth of environmental health professionals are partly because they

are well organized. A positive consequence is that this aspect may attract the best elements to the profession. Active communication can also draw the attention of supervisors (sometimes local authorities, sometimes governments or ministries) to the dynamism and high value of the profession, an impression that can have a direct impact on the status of professionals.

Means of communication

The means to be employed for external communication again depend on the target audience and the message being communicated. The following are some means that might be considered.

- Direct lobbying is an efficient way to disseminate a message. It implies that the number of persons targeted is limited (often decision-makers), that they have the time and willingness to receive the message, and that trust or at least respect has previously been built up.
- Newsletters, journals and mail-shots are a good way of maintaining a regular link between professional associations and the outside world and of showing the vitality of the group. If they are short, and written in appropriate language, they have the chance of being read by a large readership.
- The use of the public media, through direct relationships with journalists, press releases or the production of videos, films or reports, is an effective way to reach the public at large.
- Organizing professional forums and meetings may be an efficient way to foster cooperation and exchange of experiences between environmental health professionals and those outside the profession. They are also often a good opportunity to promote the expertise of environmental health professionals, in particular through the publication of reports and proceedings.
- Electronic media, such as Web sites, messaging services and CD-ROMs, are powerful tools that can be used by professional associations. Some features, such as search engines, hyperlinks and relational databases, can be used to provide quick access to complex information accumulated by environmental health

professionals or others. A well conceived Web site is also a good tool to promote the work and concepts of environmental health associations. Lastly, CD-ROMs are a cheap and powerful way to provide partners with a large amount of information.

6

Continuing Professional Development

The World Health Organization has emphasized the central role of health professionals in achieving health targets. It has also emphasized the necessity of engaging professionals from a wide range of fields in working together to improve environmental health status.

One way of supporting professional capacity in dealing with challenges is to address the needs of professionals to develop their competence over the life-span of their professional careers (17). The world of environmental health professionals is constantly changing. The issues confronting them are not static, and they need to keep abreast of technological and conceptual advances in their particular field. Evolution of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes is thus essential if environmental health professionals are to meet current and future challenges.

The significant political and economic changes that have taken place in the WHO European Region in the past decade have placed a heavy burden on environmental health professionals in coming to terms with the situations in which they now find themselves. For some of them, these changes have not only involved different work practices and methods, but have also resulted in the delegation of new responsibilities for which their previous training and experience had inadequately prepared them. In some cases these changes resulted in loss of resources, uncertainty of continued employment

and a diminution in career prospects. The relationship, therefore, between professional development and career development is inextricably linked, and both employers and employees have strong motivation to work together on this issue.

Environmental health associations have an important role in this process, as they can provide elements of this training themselves as well as working with employers to provide in-service training, research projects, secondments, scholarships, study leave, etc. as appropriate. These associations bring a unique perspective to integrating the environmental professional profile and the forms of support needed for professionals to master their new responsibilities. Experience has shown that professionals can take a high degree of responsibility for their own professional development, as they are generally more responsive to developing a vision of where improvements are necessary or where gaps may be appearing in their expertise.

CPD has been defined as “the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skills and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioner’s working life” (18).

The concept of CPD activities encompasses progress and development in improving the nature and quality of the service that professionals provide to society. These activities might include:

- keeping up to date with developments in existing areas of professional expertise;
- developing new knowledge and skills that supplement and enhance existing expertise;
- questioning and reporting on issues and problems in existing practice; and
- conducting research into issues and problems arising out of current practice that cannot be solved by existing knowledge and skills.

CORE ACTIVITIES

Core activities (i.e. those that are both directly relevant and highly structured) might include courses, conferences, seminars and workshops that cover topics within the recognized environmental health functions or that are directly relevant to the provision of environmental health services. Other such activities might include the preparation and subsequent presentation or publication of papers, in-house workshops and further study.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Supplementary activities are structured activities, perhaps involving the acquisition of knowledge and skills, that can be used in environmental health practice. The purpose of this category is to widen the range of activities that can contribute to CPD and encourage members to broaden their range of knowledge and skills. For example, general courses in computing, science, management, languages and social sciences can also be included in this category.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

These activities might include the day-to-day keeping up to date with professional issues by general reading, or structured learning that has no real relevance to the profession.

MONITORING CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

It is useful if the activities in which members engage are recorded and verified. Should CPD be a condition of membership of an association, there may be stringent recording of this. The recording of such activities is primarily the responsibility of each member. These details could be kept in an appropriate manner, with supporting documentation of all activities claimed.

To maintain a vibrant association, it is important that the competence of members be developed on a continuing basis. Each member

has a personal responsibility to maintain his or her professional competence to the collective benefit of all members and the society he or she serves. Similarly, environmental health associations should consider investing resources in assisting members to meet these commitments.

To fulfil this duty, environmental health associations could consider developing a CPD programme. The basis of this may be mandatory or voluntary depending on national needs, members' views and the resources available. There are a variety of approaches in elaborating these programmes.

Some associations have developed formal CPD programmes for the professional development of their members. This can involve organizing, certifying and accrediting CPD programmes that members are required to follow as a condition of employment. This is not the norm, however, and requires significant resources and a high degree of cooperation with employers (see Case study 11).

Case study 11. Assessing professional competence – the experience in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (19)

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Graduate Membership of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health can be obtained on being awarded a Certificate of Registration.

Following at least two years of professional practice, a Graduate Member may then apply to take an assessment of professional competence (APC).

The APC is an assessment of the skills that have developed during practice, and that are considered essential in enabling the technical knowledge and skills acquired during qualification to be applied in a professional manner. The skills areas are divided into seven groupings (investigative, analytical, interpretative, communicative, educative, organizational and attitudinal), and assessors follow a structured marking scheme.

The scheme involves three elements:

- the preparation of a case study, demonstrating some or all of the necessary skills;
- the production of a log of professional practice, which reflects the nature and level of work undertaken during, at least, the two most recent years of professional practice; and
- a professional interview, with two assessors, structured around the case study and professional practice.

Case study 11. (contd)

The assessors will then make an overall judgement as to the candidate's skills in the defined areas, and determine whether or not the candidate has demonstrated, to their satisfaction, an acceptable level of professional competence as described within the assessment scheme.

The APC is an assessment of professional skills, not of technical knowledge, and assessors have been trained to undertake the professional assessment in a fair and consistent manner. The assessors provide an opportunity for each applicant to demonstrate his or her skills in each of the seven skill domains during the interview. The result of each APC is notified within 21 days of the interview.

If successful, applicants will be admitted to full corporate membership. Unsuccessful applicants are notified of the reasons for failure, including reference to the principal deficiencies in the skills, as assessed.

Other associations facilitate continuing professional development for members through training courses and postgraduate study and research. By working with educational institutions or through their own resources, associations can develop relevant postgraduate courses for members, and if possible support them by making resources available. These resources can take various forms such as finance (e.g. grants or loans), facilities, learning resources or human resources. There are also possibilities for exchanging information and seminars with foreign experts in the field, and organizing training in other countries.

7

International Aspects

It can seem a daunting task to any association of environmental health professionals to begin the process of international contacts. In the face of pressing issues at local and national level, it might also seem to be a secondary consideration in terms of establishing and developing the organization. Nevertheless, developing international contacts at the formative stage can be invaluable in terms of tapping into the network of knowledge and experience that already exists, and in gaining an insight into international initiatives that are taking place. For long-established associations, it is equally important to maintain and expand existing links to avoid becoming introspective.

It could also be argued that existing associations have a role, perhaps even a duty, in assisting new associations in their initial development. The argument for this is that groups of professionals from a number of countries, working in cooperation, are more likely to have their concerns addressed if they can lobby, educate and stimulate public debate across national boundaries. The development of these international contacts also opens up the potential for information-sharing across a wide range of professional, cultural and political spheres. This is mutually beneficial to both newly formed and established associations.

BILATERAL CONTACTS BETWEEN ASSOCIATIONS

One of the initial benefits of establishing such links is the realization that existing associations, regardless of their current status, all had

humble beginnings. Some existing associations such as the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland and the Environmental Health Officers Association of Ireland host international seminars, conferences and exchange programmes that are a useful means of sharing experience and expertise. Developing international contacts with other organizations can be a useful way of learning from their experiences, adapting their strategies where appropriate, and not repeating their mistakes. Conversely, there is a huge pool of knowledge and expertise that has yet to be tapped from those countries in the European Region where associations of professionals have yet to be formed.

FEDERATIONS OF ASSOCIATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Before dealing with other international aspects, it is worth looking at what existing associations of environmental health professionals have done for themselves in terms of developing international contacts. This brings a critical mass of like-minded professionals together to work on common issues, and can have an important role in providing information exchange and in assisting newer associations.

There are two federations currently engaged in working on the international aspects of environmental health. One is the International Federation of Environmental Health, which has member organizations from every continent and has a European group. The other is the Inter-American Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering, which is based in the Americas but maintains links with some organizations in Europe.

While Case studies 12 and 13 are proof that associations of environmental health professionals working together can achieve success at international level, there still remains much to be done. In the European Region, there is a need to address the problems faced by environmental health professionals in countries where no associations currently exist to support their position. The presence of a federation should be a source of hope and optimism to professionals aspiring to form associations. That hope and optimism can only be

Case study 12. The International Federation of Environmental Health (3)

This Federation, formed in 1985, comprises approximately 30 member organizations of environmental health professionals. In addition to full Members, the Federation has Associate and Academic Associate Members. The latter are organizations that have an interest in environmental health, although some are excluded from full membership because they are "regional" and not "national" organizations.

The International Federation aims to link organizations of environmental health professionals around the world. It has no individual members. Each constituent body appoints representatives to the Federation Council, which is its governing body. The Council elects a member to act as Chairman, and it also elects the Federation President.

Among other things, the Federation seeks to provide means of exchanging information and experience on environmental health. It holds congresses and meetings to discuss subjects relevant to environmental health science and administration, represents the interests of environmental health to state agencies, national governments and international organizations, and promotes field studies of environmental health control.

The Federation works to disseminate knowledge concerning environmental health and promote cooperation between countries where environmental health issues are transboundary. It promotes the interchange of people working in this sector and the exchange of Members' publications of a scientific and technical nature.

The objectives of the Federation are to:

- provide a focal point for national organizations of officers, whether in state or local government or private employment, whose concern is the control of the environment in the interest of public health;
- provide a means of exchanging information on environmental health matters, including systems of organization and management;
- publish an international journal of environmental health and other literary matter relating to environmental health;
- hold congresses and other meetings for the consideration of subjects relating to environmental health;
- represent the interests of environmental health to international organizations and at meetings of such organizations;
- represent the interests of environmental health to national governments, state agencies and international organizations;
- promote the study of environmental sciences and exchange information about training and educational methods;
- promote field studies of environmental health control and disseminate knowledge concerning environmental health;
- cooperate with other organizations working on matters relating to environmental health;

Case study 12. (contd)

- promote cooperation between states where environmental health problems cross national frontiers;
- promote the interchange of persons engaged in environmental health work;
- exchange publications of a technical, scientific and educational nature relating to environmental health produced by constituent Members of the Federation and publicity material produced for health education purposes;
- borrow or raise money in such manner as the Federation may think fit for all or any one or more of the objects of the Federation;
- afford government departments, international organizations, professional and academic institutions and trade associations facilities for ascertaining the collective views of national organizations;
- endow and receive property for the endowment of a library, laboratory or other institution;
- hold examinations, and grant and award prizes and certificates on the result of the examinations, to any student for proficiency in the science of environmental health and kindred subjects.

Case study 13. Inter-American Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering

The Inter-American Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering (AIDIS) is the first and largest association of professionals in the field of environmental health. AIDIS has 24 national chapters representing 34 countries on the American continent, with more than 30 000 members and a permanent international headquarters in São Paulo, Brazil. The Association has several agreements with international bodies, with the aim of increasing interchange and cooperation among institutions.

Activities and services to the members comprise information and training, the organization of congresses, seminars, workshops and round table discussions, the publication of specialized magazines, catalogues and books, and scholarship grants. Technical work is carried out through the technical divisions, which consist of working groups specializing in various fields of sanitation and environmental sciences to maintain a permanent exchange of information, experience and knowledge. The technical divisions cover drinking-water, wastewater, preservation of the environment and control of contamination, legislation, regulation and standards, solid wastes, consulting work, services and equipment of materials, education, qualification and training, and quality standards. The divisions also deal with service companies and other bodies in the fields of basic sanitation and emergencies and catastrophes.

vindicated if existing associations take a lead in fostering and supporting these professionals in their efforts.

THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ACTION PLAN FOR EUROPE (EHAPE)

International cooperation is essential if environmental health issues are to be addressed effectively. The nature of many of the environmental health issues confronting the European Region have transboundary implications, and the importance of working together on resolving these issues is becoming more recognized. The information revolution has created opportunities for people from all strata of society to develop and maintain global contact. This has proved to be an empowering development that has tremendous potential for strengthening international contacts.

The increasing political, social and economic integration taking place in the European Region, as typified by the expansion of the European Union, are also strong driving forces for developing international contacts at all levels. It is in this context that associations of environmental health professionals can develop strong international links that can bring about a synergistic energy in pursuance of their goals.

A forum for environmental health professionals to work as partners in the development of international initiatives has been presented by the decision to include representatives from environmental health professionals on the European Environmental Health Committee. This Committee, which was formed through the EHAPE process, brings countries and international organizations together to cooperate on environmental health issues. The inclusion of environmental health professionals as a group on this committee puts an onus on finding representatives who are in fact representative of professionals across the European Region.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

There are a number of intergovernmental organizations in the European Region that operate initiatives and programmes that can support

associations of environmental health professionals. These include the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the European Union and the United Nations Environment Programme.

CONCLUSION

Developing international activities comes at a price. It involves travel expenses, translation services and other costs. It also involves selling the importance of international work to members of associations who may not see the full benefit or the relevance of this work to them individually or to their association. Nevertheless, experience to date indicates that there are benefits from this work. Developing ties with professionals in other countries helps in building a common understanding of environmental health issues and helps create a common appreciation of how these issues might be tackled.

In countries where there are serious environmental health challenges, the efforts put into international collaboration can be harnessed to bring together experience and knowledge of best practice. While there may be an initial outlay in terms of resources (and perhaps scepticism on the part of some members) there are also the potential benefits that environmental health associations can reap from tapping into the wider community of similar organizations.

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Dublin, Ireland, 19–20 April 1999**

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In some European countries, environmental health professionals have organized themselves into associations, but in the majority such associations are not well established and have not realized their full potential in civil society. Given the increasing awareness of the general population and the emergence of specialized groups, there is a need for new means of communication that will ensure a constructive dialogue among professionals, decision-makers at political level, the economic sector and the general public. In this rapidly changing world, environmental health professionals must constantly adapt their practices, knowledge and skills. In this respect all partners at national and international level acknowledge the importance of professional associations.

This publication strives to bring together the collective experience of a range of existing associations of environmental health, while also providing the basic information that will be of particular value to an emerging association or to groups of professionals aspiring to develop such associations. In that sense, it is not a blueprint but a guide, and recognizes the need for such associations to find and follow their own evolutionary path.

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