

MALAYSIA



The Management of Environmental Risk Factors which Impact on Human Health

Part I

A National Framework (Policy) on Environmental Health for MALAYSIA

Ministry of Health
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This page is to contain the statement from the relevant minister or Prime Minister which gives this document official status

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Ministry of Health

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NATIONAL FRAMEWORK (POLICY) ON ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Preface

This document is the first of a set of three documents that sets out a policy framework for Environmental Health in Malaysia. The second document (Part 2: National Strategic Plan for Environmental Health) sets out a series of strategies designed to achieve the objectives outline in this policy framework. The third document (Part 3: National Environmental Health Action Plan) is a working document for the various sectors of government involved in environmental health activities to enable a coordinated approach to achieve the objectives for environmental health.

The approach outlined in these three documents is the overall Malaysian National Environmental Health Action Plan or (MNEHAP). This in turn is part of a regional approach to a greater collaborative effort by the various sectors of government in countries in the region to further the objectives of environmental health.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The United Nations Conference “Environment and Development” in 1992, in Rio de Janeiro recognized the intimate interaction between environmental quality and human health. This important relationship was one of the main themes discussed at the conference. In Agenda 21 of the Rio Conference, the programs for achieving sustainable development are foreseen, and the first principle of the Rio Declaration claims that in order to achieve sustainable development, attention is to be focused on the right to healthy and full-value life in harmony with nature. Environmental protection and public health goals are in general replenishing each other. Close collaboration of these two sectors is crucial for effective environmental health management. Environmental Health is the branch of public health that is concerned with all aspects of the natural and built environment that may affect human health.

The term **environmental health**, as defined by WHO, addresses all the physical, chemical, and biological factors external to a person, and all the related factors impacting behaviors. It encompasses the assessment and control of those environmental factors that can potentially affect health. It is targeted towards preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments. This definition excludes behavior not related to environment, as well as behavior related to the social and cultural environment, and genetics.

Human activities are changing the composition of Earth's atmosphere and are contributing to climate change. Climate change is a significant and emerging threat to public health, and changes the way we must look at protecting vulnerable populations. Climate variability and change cause death and disease through natural disasters, such as heat waves, floods and droughts. In addition, many important diseases are highly sensitive to changing temperatures and precipitation. These include common vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue; as well as other major killers such as malnutrition and diarrhea. Climate change already contributes to the global burden of disease, and this contribution is expected to grow in the future. Integrated efforts by all relevant stakeholders should be undertaken to address this emerging issue that influences environmental health.

To address the major environmental health problems and needs for action, many countries in the world have decided to prepare and implement a NEHAP (National Environmental Health Action Plan). NEHAP presents strategies on how to improve environmental health within the country and defines the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders.

Experiences in Europe prove to be good examples in NEHAP preparation. At Helsinki Conference in 1994, all Member States of WHO European Region have decided to develop National Environmental Health Action Plans (NEHAPs) reflecting country specific problems and needs. While developing NEHAPs it is necessary to collaborate closely with all relevant stakeholders involved in environmental health.

In this region the First Ministerial Regional Forum on Environment and Health in South East and East Asian Countries held in Bangkok in August 2007 agreed that member countries should prepare and regularly update NEHAP. Progress is being made for countries in the region to develop their NEHAP.

Environmental health issues are complex and cut across sectors and agencies, requiring coordination and cooperation among them. Government agencies on their own have developed and implemented environmental health related sectors and programs, which if not properly done will have impact on human health. Examples of those sectors are water supply, drainage and irrigation, sewerage, solid waste management and hazardous waste management.

Improving environmental health in Malaysia requires all stakeholders and affected groups to recognize their common aspirations, develop common goals and work to strengthen their communication to forge partnerships on common actions. This national policy on environmental health will provide the cornerstone of the government's approach towards the sustainable development, socio-economic development, the protection of the environment and the promotion and protection of human health. This framework (policy) has been prepared to form part of the 10th Malaysia Plan

1.2 Objectives Definitions and Framework

1.2.1 Objectives

The framework (policy) is formulated as a legal reference and provides policy directions for strengthening and improving environmental quality and health in alignment with Malaysia's development goals.

The framework (policy) is:

- To develop and maintain human health and sustainable development in the country.
- To strengthen collaboration and cooperation with other sectors for effective use of resources in improving human health and sustainable development.

1.2.2 Definitions

- **Health:** health is described as a complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity.
- **Environment:** environment means any organic or inorganic features, existing naturally or created by mankind, and its surroundings such as people, animal, plants and others, that have positive and negative interactions with and impact on each other, whether detrimental or favorable to the life, sustainability and development of humans and nature.
- **Environmental health:** addresses all the physical, chemical, and biological factors external to a person, and all the related factors impacting behaviors. It encompasses the assessment and control of those environmental factors that can potentially affect health. It is targeted towards preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments. This definition excludes behavior not related to environment, as well as behavior related to the social and cultural environment, and genetics.

1.2.3 Structure of the national framework (policy)

The National Framework (Policy) on Environmental Health has a structure to be used for all sectors which might provide a negative impact and/or the opportunity for a positive impact on the health of the population, such as industry and trade, mining and energy, agriculture and forestry, transport, culture and social, and any infrastructure development agencies.

1.3 Rationale for an Environmental Health Framework (Policy) for Malaysia

1.3.1 Regional and global status on Environmental Health

Environmental, genetic and behavioral practices are the major factors contributing to the increase in environmental and public health problems and challenges. Contact with air hazards, unsafe water, soil, and physiological hazards create high morbidity, disability, and mortality. Despite the advanced health technology and development technologies the world still faces high morbidity, injury, and mortality rates.

In the recent World Health Organization report on environmental health, the main findings are:

- Each year, 13 millions deaths are caused by environmental impacts.
- In developing countries $\frac{1}{3}$ of the morbidity and mortality are due to poor environmental factors.

Environmental factors that caused the leading diseases are:

- 94% of diarrhea cases are due to untreated water, unsafe drinking water, personal hygiene, poor sanitation and unsafe food consumption.
- 41% of lower acute respiratory cases are caused by outdoor and indoor air pollution.
- 44% of accidental injuries occurred in the industrial zone with poor workplace conditions.
- 42% of malaria cases are impacted by poor management of habitat and land use and poor water resources management.
- Poor architectural and transport system design caused 40% of traffic accidents cases.
- Direct contact with indoor and urban air pollution is the leading cause of 42% of cases of chronic restricted pulmonary system.

At the global level, the World Health Organization in 2002 found that 24% of total diseases are due to environmental factors and caused 23% of the mortalities and 85 diseases out of 102 diseases are due to the interactions with poor environmental factors. In addition, 60% to 80% of morbidity in developing countries and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the mortality are due to environmental factors.

1.3.2 Environmental Health in Malaysia

Malaysian society is increasingly urbanized, more populous and more complex. As a consequence, air, water and soil contamination has increased and persistent chemical pollutants have become widespread. In addition, global climate change presents new environmental health hazards. These factors contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, physiological and neurological disorders, and increased incidences of a range of cancers. With these situations it is necessary for Malaysia to formulate and established the environmental health policy for planning, control and mitigation of the emerging health impacts from new environmental health hazards.

Sustainable development and its relationship to promoting good quality of life are high on the Government development agenda. Central agencies are concerned with the impact of national expenditure on those sectors. The Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister Department has agreed that NEHAP was to be developed in the 9th Malaysia Plan (MP) by the Ministry of Health (MOH). The Engineering Services Division has been given the task by the Ministry to coordinate the development and implementation of NEHAP to be considered as part of the 10th MP.

Currently the Engineering Services Division, MOH has prepared MOHEHAP (Ministry of Health Environmental Health Action Plan) documents. Gathering of basic information on areas of concern in Malaysian Environmental Health was done and documented in 2007. The documents will provide an initial insight as to the scope of the NEHAP preparation. In December 2007 the Division had also organized the 1st Malaysian NEHAP Seminar

which was attended by relevant stakeholders. A consensus was formed among the participants as to the need for Malaysia to have its NEHAP.

The current status of environmental health related programs/activities that are being implemented by various agencies and stakeholders have been carried out and formed the basis for the formulation of NEHAP. Analysis of the current status included the definition and scope of environmental health in Malaysia, Government policies, programs and activities that have a bearing on environmental health; role of other stakeholders in influencing environmental health; identifying those areas related to environmental health that do not receive appropriate attention; resources and costs that are currently incurred by the Government for the provision of environmental health related programs and activities and legal, administrative and organizational system of implementing and managing environmental health programs and activities.

1.4 Rationale and requirement for policy development

1.4.1 Rationale

- Malaysia has already committed to different international treaties and conventions such as Protection of Ozone Depression, Climate Change, Biodiversity, Chemical and Waste Management Treaties.
- The global and regional environments have changed, especially due to climate change effects, which play a major role in the outbreak of diseases such as diarrhea, dysenteries and typhoid.
- High mortality and morbidity of common diseases still relate to environmental factors.
- Promotion and improvement of environment and health through sustainable economic development is essential for national development.
- Environmental impact and disease sources are cross-border world-wide issues.

1.4.2 Requirements

- National policy formulation is a prerequisite for the development of an effective national strategic plan on environmental health.
- To support the national policy, strategies and work plans of other sectors related to environment are essential.
- To strengthen the collaboration and cooperation among different sectors in the environment areas with the health sector to effectively execute the national policy and strategies.
- To give priorities for local and national investments in the development of Malaysia.

Chapter 2 Principles, Vision, Mission and Objectives

2.1 Principles

The following guiding principles form the basis of the Framework (Policy) on Environmental Health

- The implementation of the program in conformity with the UN Millennium Development Goals, and the aims of WHO and other international organisations;
- A focus of activities on the protection of the environment and human health from hazards and a decrease in related mortality, morbidity and injuries in the population;
- Enhancement of the roles and responsibilities of governmental and non governmental organisations, business organisations and the community to reduce environmental impacts on health;
- Enhancement of inter-sectoral cooperation through strategic alliances, with the aim of reducing environmental risks to health;
- Coordination of the activities of the Framework (Policy), Strategic and Action Plans and other projects related to environmental health; effectively allocate funds; and provide assistance, support and cooperation with the public and private sectors and international organisations.

2.2 Vision

For the Ministry of Health, Malaysia is to be a nation of healthy individuals, families and communities, through a health system that is equitable, affordable, efficient, technologically appropriate, environmentally adaptable and consumer-friendly, with emphasis on quality, innovation, health promotion and respect for human dignity and which promotes individual's responsibility and community participation towards an enhanced quality of life.

2.3 Mission

The mission of the MOH is to build partnerships for health, to motivate and facilitate the people to:

- Fully attain their health potential
- Appreciate health as a valuable asset
- Take positive actions to further improve and sustain their health status.

2.4 The Framework (Policy) Objectives

- To establish the organizational structure for the management of environmental health.
- To ensure commitment and sustainability from all levels, through the establishment and maintenance of government structures and mechanisms, that development and economic activities affecting the environment and human health give consideration to the potential health impacts and ensure that human health is enhanced.
- To improve the relevance, quality, accessibility and availability of a range of data sets on environmental parameters related to health (i.e. physical, chemical, biological and psychosocial in air, water, soil, food and human ecology) for purposes of situation, trend and impact analysis.
- To sustain and enhance the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for the identification and evaluation of environmental risk factors that may influence human health.
- To strengthen risk management measures (including legislative controls) for individual activities, in both the private and public sectors, on the basis of objective assessments of the risks.
- To develop the infrastructure capacity (including laboratory and other support services) to provide appropriate services and support mechanisms for the effective identification, monitoring and evaluation processes to enhance health and for the management of environmental risk factors which adversely affect health.
- To enhance professional education and training, especially for those within government agencies, to collaborate with others to effectively implement the environmental health policy.
- To encourage and foster active and informed public participation through the provision of appropriately designed educational and information programs.
- To improve the quality and quantity of the research and technical development effort in the identification, monitoring, evaluation and risk management methods related to environment and health.
- To improve international collaborative efforts to further develop environmental health in the region and mutually reinforce activities to improve environmental health.

Section 3 Implementation

3.1 The Implementation Process

The Ministry of Health will be responsible for strengthening collaboration between ministries and related agencies to promulgate this national framework (policy) to ensure a consistent approach and the harmonization of policies for environmental health in Malaysia. Appropriate action will be taken to further this process which also includes the implementation of the National Strategic Plan and National Action Plan for Environmental Health.

3.2 The National Environmental Health Action Plan

Environmental Health Strategic and Action Plans have been prepared to support the implementation of the framework (policy). These plans give details of specific strategies and actions to achieve the environmental health objectives for Malaysia. They set out strategies to achieve the objectives and specific actions and assign responsibilities to agencies of government together with a notional time frame.

3.3 Performance indicators

For the assessment of the progress towards the implementation of the Policy and Plan the following indicators are proposed:

- The legal environment for environmental health will have been revised and the system of identification, monitoring, evaluation and risk management, will have been improved;
- The sources and reasons for environmental risks will have been identified, and the assessment of the relationships between environmental health determinants and health status will be determined;
- Appropriate intervention strategies to manage environmental risks to health will have been developed, implemented and evaluated;
- The human capacity building of the environmental health sector, including human and infrastructure capacity, will have been improved;
- The level of education of the population on environment and health will have been increased; community participation in the promotional activities and programs on environmental health will have been increased;
- The basic environmental health indicators will have been improved;
- The morbidity and mortality directly caused by environmental risk factors of a physical, chemical, biological or psychosocial nature will have been decreased as seen in the Health Targets set by the Ministry of Health.

3.4 Policy review

This National Framework (Policy) will be available for wide consultation and once adopted will be formally reviewed and revised periodically to ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of the Malaysian population and the international community.

***Prepared
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