

Hidalgo County



Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan

April 2023

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Approval and Implementation

Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan

This appendix is hereby approved for implementation and supersedes all previous editions.

Eduardo Olivarez
Director, Health & Human Services

Date

Ricardo Saldaña
Emergency Management Coordinator

Date

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Authority

The Hidalgo County Commissioner's Court has the authority to approve and implement the Public Health & Medical Services Plan. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan includes 12 appendices. The County Commissioner's Court approved the Public Health & Medical Services Plan on [REDACTED], 2023. This plan aligns with the County's Emergency Basic Plan, ESF-8: Public Health that was approved by the County Commissioner's Court on September 7, 2021.

Purpose

The purpose of the Public Health and Medical Services Plan: Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan is to establish emergency environmental health operations, assign responsibilities, and provide general and specific actions and responses to environmental health problems associated with disasters and daily operations. This will include organizational arrangements, operational concepts, responsibilities, and procedures to protect the environmental health of Hidalgo County. This plan addresses staff roles and responsibilities for vector control, food safety, drinking water safety, sanitation, wastewater, solid waste management, hazardous waste management, air quality, radiation exposure and monitoring, chemical/toxic release control, and animal control under the direction of the Environmental Health Division Manager. Additionally, this appendix provides a coordinated response plan to actual or potential public and environmental health problems associated with disasters. Response and documentation to these issues is generally carried out in accordance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) Incident Command Structure (ICS). Internal documentation including staff rosters, daily activity reports, finance reports, etc., are also filed at the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department.

Scope

The scope of HCHHSD Environmental Health Division's Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan details appropriate actions to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a threat to public health, welfare, or the environment caused by an illness-related outbreak, a natural disaster, an industrial- or transportation-related incident, or a deliberate act of terrorism.

When a disaster, either natural or man-made, is identified and declared, the HCHHSD Director, in coordination with the EMC, will provide notification to the Environmental Division Manager to commence disaster response actions.

HCHHSD will not have primary responsibility in all areas but will coordinate with designated agencies and/or city departments to identify and address gaps in service to support a healthy environment in Hidalgo County. HCHHSD may also coordinate with regional, state, and federal agencies, and other parties in addressing environmental health needs. This coordination shall follow standard ICS protocols as described in the Hidalgo County Public Health and Medical Plan and its appendices.

Appropriate general actions may include, but are not limited to, actions to prevent, minimize, or mitigate a hazardous materials release; efforts to ensure food, pool, and housing safety for the community; development of methods and procedures to prevent vector borne disease transmission; ensuring a safe and sanitary potable water supply; and containing and preventing contamination of the groundwater by wastewater releases.

Examples of specific actions may include:

- sampling a drinking water supply to determine if it is potable,
- stabilizing a hazardous materials release with berms, dikes, or impoundments,
- inspection of mass feeding stations and temporary shelters,
- decontaminating buildings and structures,
- using drainage control, fences, warning signs, or other site-control precautions,
- removing drums, barrels, or other containers that contain hazardous materials,
- Other measures as deemed necessary.

Goal and Objective

The overall goal of environmental health operations during a disaster is to minimize loss of life and human suffering, prevent disease, and promote optimum health by controlling environmental factors.

The overall objectives of environmental health operations during a disaster are to:

- Provide leadership and guidance in all environmental health-related incidents,
- Provide environmental health protection measures,
- Provide guidance for food handling, mass feeding and sanitation in emergency facilities,
- Inspect and advice on general sanitation matters,
- Coordinate environmental health-related activities among other local public and private response agencies and groups,
- Assist with damage assessments,
- Document and maintain accurate records of incident expenditures, activities, events, staffing, issues, resources, etc., using the standard ICS forms, WebEOC, and internal forms that are to be kept on file at the HCHHSD.

Explanation of Terms

Acronyms

CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear
HCHHSD	Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department
DSHS	Department of State Health Services
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency

ICS	Incident Command System
MOC	Medical Operation Center
NIMS	National Incident Management System
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
TCEQ	Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

Definitions

Sanitation: conditions relating to public health, especially the provision of clean drinking water and adequate sewage disposal.

Wastewater: water that has been used in the home, in a business, or as part of an industrial process, and so contains waste products; sewage.

Solid Waste: solid waste means any garbage refuse, sludge from a wastewater treatment plant, water supply treatment plant, or air pollution control facility and other discarded.

Situation & Assumptions

Situation

In the event of a disaster, access to safe food and drinking water may be disrupted for parts or all of Hidalgo County. This disruption may result in a threat to public health without intervention. In the event of major damage to restaurants, grocery stores, and residences, mass feeding centers and/or emergency shelters will be used to maximum capacity. Some food facilities may attempt to continue to operate following an emergency. Maintaining food safety at these facilities will be a high priority requiring close monitoring to prevent food-borne illnesses. These functions may include:

- Providing guidance on food safety,
- Surveying the food delivery system for food contamination or spoilage,
- Conducting inspections to ensure food is prepared and served in a manner that minimizes the risks of food-borne illnesses,
- Providing guidance and inspection of feeding centers and shelters, monitoring, and investigating these sites for foodborne illnesses and outbreaks,
- Advising permitted and non-permitted food facilities on required food safety modifications,
- Providing assistance to food facilities that continue to operate under emergency conditions and advising them of any food safety requirements related to such emergency conditions.

During a disaster of communicable and infectious diseases, food- and water-borne illness may be a serious threat to the public and lead to increased morbidity and mortality. A disaster may disrupt routine sanitation services provided to the public. This disruption may result in secondary effects related to public and environmental health. Hazardous

materials and the threat of bioterrorism in the County and across the nation can pose significant environmental health issues in addition to those threats to public health. Both the built and natural environments can be significantly harmed by contamination and exposure to pollutants, toxins, and other hazardous agents.

Like the public-at-large, the animal population in the County and surrounding natural areas are subject to exposure and harm arising from disasters and environmental health issues. The Environmental Health Division, through the assistance of Hidalgo County and other city health departments, has the ultimate responsibility for maintaining and promoting environmental health before, during, and after a disaster.

Assumptions

1. HCHHSD and its Environmental Health Division should have primary responsibility for addressing many areas of environmental health.
2. In responding to hazardous materials spills and other CBRN incidents, HCHHSD, through the Hidalgo County EMC, will contact EPA, which will have primary responsibility.
3. Inspectors from the HCHHSD Environmental Health Division will perform required food and sanitation inspections and monitoring in accordance with applicable statutes and regulations.
4. Hidalgo County has the capability of addressing the range of environmental health issues and resources to mitigate, respond to, and recover from their effects. As needed, regional, state, and federal resources may be available to support County efforts.

Concept of Operations

General

The HCHHSD Environmental Health Division has routine responsibility for vector control, animal control, food establishment inspection, sanitation, and safety services, and performing identified environmental health inspections of specific sites. In a disaster, these services will continue to the extent possible. Personnel may be tasked with additional duties within regulatory and statutory scope of practice as authorized by ordinance or law. The primary goals of HCHHSD are to:

- a. Provide leadership and guidance in all environmental health-related incidents,
- b. Provide environmental health protection measures,
- c. Provide guidance in food handling, mass feeding and sanitation in emergency facilities,
- d. Inspect and advise on general sanitation matters,
- e. Coordinate environmental health-related activities among other local public and private response agencies and groups,
- f. Assist with damage assessments.

Foodborne and Waterborne Outbreak Surveillance, Investigation and Control

Food safety and security is the assurance that food remains uncontaminated and safe for consumption. The CDC estimates that approximately 76 million cases of foodborne illness

occur each year, resulting in 5,000 deaths. The public relies on the assumption that the food available for consumption in the County is safe, yet the farm to table chain offers multiple opportunities for accidental or deliberate contamination which could impact a large segment of the population.

HCHHSD may be alerted to a threat, hazard, or other significant food incident through a variety of means, including public health disease surveillance systems, from external federal, state, tribal and local government agencies, industry, consumers, and the news media. HCHHSD notifies internal and external partners of impending, ongoing, or resurging food incidents via pre-developed, prioritized notification lists. Once HCHHSD receives notification, HCHHSD epidemiologists coordinate with local and regional health departments and other agencies to conduct epidemiological investigations to determine the causative agent, mode of transmission, persons at risk and recommend appropriate control measures. The agencies involved in the investigation depend upon the pathogen, the suspected or implicated transmission pathway (person-to-person or indirectly through environmental exposure), number and location of ill persons, and state and federal food safety rules and laws.

HCHHSD compiles information and completes an initial assessment to determine if the incident requires activation of state resources. If a large-scale multi-jurisdictional foodborne outbreak occurs, HCHHSD coordinates the response in collaboration with federal, state, and local partners, and requests the deployment of Texas Rapid Response Team-Food/Feed recalls.

Food Safety

HCHHSD's Environmental Health Division shall perform routine food safety inspections, during and immediately following a disaster to determine any corrective actions required; an inventory of affected food establishments shall be generated. Once generated, Inspectors will perform food safety inspections as follows:

1. All food establishments set up to provide food for disaster workers or those displaced by the disaster (i.e., in general shelters) shall be assessed, permitted, monitored and inspected in accordance with County Ordinances to ensure food safety.
2. The Environmental Health Division Inspectors may expedite permitting and other food safety functions, as applicable, at the discretion of the Environmental Health Division Manager.
 - a. Such temporary disaster food establishments shall be in compliance with the same standards and regulations applicable to traditional food establishments permitted and regulated by the HCHHSD Environmental Health Division.

Drinking Water Supply and Safety

During and following a disaster, the HCHHSD Environmental Health Division shall coordinate with the TCEQ to identify threats to the public water supply. As needed, the HCHHSD may coordinate with the TCEQ in support of managing water supply issues.

To ensure a smooth flow of operations before, during, and after a disaster, HCHHSD shall ensure that:

- a. Work schedules are adjusted so that key staff members are onsite or can be reached to keep all services operational if a facility remains online or to shut down and startup facilities when necessary.
- b. Establish and schedule emergency operations and clean-up crews.
- c. Review the HCHHSD emergency response plan and ensure all contacts are current.
- d. Notify the TCEQ Public Drinking Water Program at (512) 239-4691 if the system's sampling schedule needs to be adjusted.

In addition, HCHHSD in coordination with OEM and local precincts will respond to any other disaster needs or corrective actions identified that may affect drinking water supply and safety.

Vector Control and Surveillance

The HCHHSD Director shall monitor epidemiological surveillance data to identify vector-based disease (See Public Health and Medical Services Plan, Appendix 9: Epidemiology and Laboratory) and shall direct the Environmental Health Division Manager to perform routine and individualized vector control activities in response to epidemiological data and other intelligence sources.

The HCHHSD Director, in coordination with appropriate vector control subject matter experts, shall issue health alerts, news releases, and other information to the public to address vector-based threats to public health (See Public Health and Medical Services Plan, Appendix 2: Communications Plan).

HCHHSD Environmental Health Division personnel shall work with state and local health departments, industry, and international partners to quickly detect and respond to outbreaks by:

- a. Enacting procedures for vector control activities to include the control of flies, mosquitoes, and ectoparasites.
- b. Supervising methods and procedures for control of rodents.
- c. Coordinating the disposal/removal of dead animal activities with Animal Control services to minimize vectors such as flies ectoparasites and rodents.
- d. Conducting surveys and surveillance in coordination with the HCHHSD Epidemiology and Surveillance Division to determine the potential for vector-borne disease transmission and control measures needed to prevent and control vectors.
- e. Conducting ground spraying activities in areas with confirmed mosquito populations.
- f. Providing education, training and information to citizens, schools, community groups and the media.
- g. Utilizing the Geographical Information System (GIS) to track and monitor mosquito-borne diseases.

If necessary, the Environmental Health Division Manager shall coordinate with TCEQ, the USDA, and other agencies to identify best-practices in response to unique threats.

Examples of unique threats include but are not limited to:

- Severe flooding with an extended period of stagnant water,
- Increased rodent populations following disruption of normal sanitation infrastructure.

The Environmental Health Division Manager shall, if necessary, implement Vector Control Teams under the direction of the Incident Commander to support incident response. Such direction shall follow standard ICS practices as described in the Public Health and Medical Services Plan and its appendices.

Wastewater

The Environmental Health Division shall have primary responsibility for addressing wastewater threats to environmental health in county unincorporated areas. If the response requirements for completing surveys, inspections, and evaluations exceed the ordinary response capacity of Hidalgo County, the HCHHSD Director may collaborate with TCEQ to identify recommendations to the public regarding wastewater disposal as appropriate during and immediately following a disaster. TCEQ would provide staff and supervision to complete response activities in collaboration with HCHHSD staff for support.

The HCHHSD Director will monitor epidemiological surveillance data and from other intelligence sources to identify any environmental health threats based on a disruption to water and wastewater systems. Any findings or changes are reported to the County EOC through WebEOC to have the ability to track response actions in real time and coordinate further response actions.

Sanitation

In the recovery period, the HCHHSD Director may collaborate with TCEQ to identify public/environmental health threats unique to community recovery and what resources would be most appropriate to address the threats. TCEQ would serve to take the lead on sanitation recovery response if the response required exceeds the ordinary capacity of Hidalgo County; HCHHSD would serve as support.

HCHHSD Environmental Health Division staff, including OSSF Inspectors, would be responsible to complete site inspections to determine if septic systems have failed or are underwater and are to respond to calls about failing systems. HCHHSD's responsibilities may also include addressing public health threats from stagnated water contaminated with raw sewage, addressing contamination of drinking water supplies with raw sewage, and proper disposal and collection of such sewage.

The HCHHSD Environmental Health Division:

- a. Determines the risks and hazards for the disposal of sewage where the public may come in contact or where it may contaminate drinking water supplies.

- b. Enforces Health and Safety code with regards to substandard housing within the Unincorporated County and contract Cities.
- c. Establishes quarantine areas in the event of sewage contamination.

Solid Waste Management

During a disaster, Hidalgo County OEM shall have the primary responsibility for maintaining and/or re-establishing solid waste pick-up, processing, and disposal services for Hidalgo County. TCEQ, in cooperation with Public Works, has a responsibility for evaluating damage to wastewater facilities, as well as advising local officials of findings and expedient sanitation practices that may be required in the affected areas.

HCHHSD's Director shall monitor epidemiological surveillance data and other intelligence sources to identify any environmental health threats based on a disruption to solid waste services. In addition, the HCHHSD Director may collaborate with Hidalgo County OEM to identify recommendations to the public regarding solid waste disposal as appropriate during and immediately following a disaster.

Hazardous Waste Management

In the recovery period, Hidalgo County OEM may collaborate with the HCHHSD Director or TCEQ to identify public/environmental health threats unique to community recovery and to establish a comprehensive framework for the planning, regulation, control, and management of hazardous waste which will prevent land, air and water pollution and conserve the natural, economic and energy resources of the county. This may include hazardous or construction debris (i.e., asbestos in condemned buildings) collected from homes or businesses affected by a disaster, disposal of post-flooding sludge and wastes, or disposal of biological agents and contaminated items.

The HCHHSD Director may issue guidance and recommendations to recovery workers and disaster workers in the recovery period to address safety concerns and to promote environmental health to include preventing problems related to improper management of hazardous substances before they can occur, and assuring the needed infrastructure for facilities where managing hazardous waste exists and ensuring safe operation of these facilities.

Air Quality

TCEQ and/or EPA shall monitor air quality data to identify hazardous air pollutants in the event of man-made or natural disaster. The HCHHSD Director shall direct the Environmental Health Division Manager to coordinate with TCEQ and/or EPA on routine and individualized air quality assessments in response to epidemiological data and other intelligence sources.

The Environmental Health Division Manager shall coordinate with TCEQ, the EPA, Hidalgo County Fire Marshal Department, and other agencies to identify best-practices in response to unique threats. Examples of unique threats include: 1) train derailment with toxic gas and 2) gas line explosion in a residential or commercial areas. This list is not

inclusive of all possible scenarios resulting in unique air quality issues and HCHHSD shall collaborate with outside parties, as appropriate.

The HCHHSD Director, in communication with appropriate air quality subject matter experts, will issue health alerts, press releases, and other information to the public to address air quality threats to public health.

The HCHHSD Director will, if necessary, implement Air Quality Teams, coordinating with TCEQ and the EPA, under the direction of the Incident Commander to support incident response. Such direction shall follow standard ICS practices. Environmental health inspections at shelters associated with response will be assessed during this time.

Due to meteorological conditions that may affect air quality, HCHHSD shall coordinate with the EOC/RMOC and other agencies to receive updated weather data, forecasts, and predictions that may affect spread. In the case of a hazardous materials spill resulting in disruption in air quality, the Hidalgo County Fire Marshal shall conduct necessary weather monitoring to ensure that evacuation orders are in place with Hidalgo County EMC.

Radiation Exposure

HCHHSD will coordinate with healthcare providers including hospitals, clinics, and private physician's offices (through active surveillance as described in Appendix 9: Epidemiology and Laboratory) to determine cases of radiological exposure.

The Hidalgo County Fire Marshal together with the County EMC shall designate a Radiological Officer to coordinate the City response to a radiological incident. HCHHSD, along with other city departments, may furnish appropriate support functions in support of the Radiological Officer and/or Incident Commander.

Due to the unique nature of a radiological incident, a state and/or federal response may be required. For a detailed response please refer to the Hidalgo County Emergency Management Basic Plan. HCHHSD Director may coordinate the response and/or support of the health component to a radiological incident.

HCHHSD will coordinate, as appropriate, with the RMOC to direct the healthcare community response to a radiological incident. This includes coordination tasks with Hidalgo County EMC to ensure that casualties are, as appropriate, transferred to the healthcare system.

Chemical or Toxic Release Control and Clean Up

HCHHSD shall coordinate with healthcare providers (through active surveillance as described in Appendix 9: Epidemiology and Laboratory) to determine cases of chemical or other substance exposure. For a detailed response please refer to the Emergency Management Basic Plan.

The Hidalgo County Fire Marshal has primary responsibility for responding to, and addressing, hazardous materials incidents. HCHHSD will contact, if appropriate, the

RMOC to coordinate the healthcare community response to a hazardous materials incident. This includes coordination tasks with Hidalgo County EMC to ensure that casualties are, as appropriate, transferred to the healthcare system.

Organization & Assignment of Responsibilities

Organization

The County Emergency Manager and/or designate will serve in the County EOC and will coordinate any related response activities other than medical to HCHHSD to help on the coordination to support the EOC.

In a large mass incident, coordination of healthcare response activities may require that the RMOC be activated, specially, if the response is expected to continue for a long period of time. Large-scale health and medical efforts shall be coordinated from the County EOC or RMOC, if activated.

Upon receipt of official notification of an actual or potential emergency condition, it is the responsibility of the Chief Administrative Officer to receive and evaluate all requests for health and medical assistance and to coordinate the response of all appropriate public health, medical, and mortuary services.

Assignment of Responsibilities

All agencies/organizations assigned to provide health and medical services and support are responsible for the following:

- a. Complying with the National Incident Management System (NIMS),
- b. Designating and training representatives for their agency/organization,
- c. Ensuring that appropriate standard operating procedures (SOPs) are maintained,
- d. Maintaining current notification procedures to ensure trained personnel are available for extended emergency duty in the facility, EOC/RMOC and, as needed, in the field,
- e. Updating their internal guidelines, procedures and plans as necessary.

The role of environmental health staff in a public health emergency, such as a natural or man-made disaster, will vary according to the type (i.e., terrorist related, flood, tornado, fire, or prolonged power outage) and severity of the situation. Environmental health staff have the primary responsibility for the “health” of a community following a disaster. This includes basic services such as food safety, water supply, shelter, sanitation, and waste management that need to be reestablished.

Public health emergencies are unpredictable, but they do not have to be unmanageable. Depending on the situation, a county would implement their ICS to respond to both deliberate and natural disasters. It is also possible that a disaster would involve multiple cities and counties. In the case of a large-scale event or multi-jurisdictional event, unified command would likely be used.

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Many agencies such as local municipal health departments may be involved in emergency disaster response actions. If the disaster is widespread or severe, HCHHSD staff or other agency staff may or may not be available, and they may only be able to provide some degree of limited technical assistance due to limited staff.

Regardless of which agencies are available and capable of responding, communication and coordination among all local, regional, state, and federal public environmental health professionals will be crucial to prevent confusion, miscommunication, and duplication of efforts throughout the response. Environmental health professionals will coordinate all their activities with the Public Health Emergency Preparedness, Epidemiology and Surveillance, Environmental Health Services, Emergency Management, and Health and Safety Departments.

Following a disaster, rapid and effective action is needed to save lives, protect health and stabilize the situation to avoid making the emergency worse. County environmental health staff should conduct a rapid initial qualitative assessment to collect information needed to begin an appropriate and timely response. The purpose of the assessment is to:

- a. Decide whether local capacity (i.e., county resources) is adequate or external assistance/resources are required.
- b. Identify/recognize potential threats and hazards.
- c. Assess health risks.
- d. Determine priorities and recommend actions.
- e. Develop objectives and determine priorities and intervention strategies.
- f. Perform intervention strategies, if possible, and identify necessary resources to address the situation.

First-hand information may be gathered in the field using the following techniques: on-site visual observations of the affected area; interviews with key individuals, community leaders, groups of disaster-affected people, or household members; expert measurements and testing and sampling activities (i.e., water quality testing). Environmental health staff could participate in the assessment with specialists in related professions (i.e., engineering, emergency management, community health promotion) from other departments such as Public Works, Environmental Health Services, Human Services, or other organizations. All findings will be reported to the HCHHSD Director and EMC as soon as possible.

This section describes specific response actions that local county and/or city environmental health professionals would be responsible for in the event of a natural disaster or deliberate act of terrorism.

1. The Chief Administrative Officer in coordination with the Environmental Health Division Manager and the Lead Epidemiologist will monitor epidemiological surveillance data to identify vector-based disease (See Public Health and Medical Services Plan, Appendix 9: Epidemiology and Laboratory). The Environmental Health Division Manager will direct his vector control staff to perform routine and

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individualized vector control activities in response to epidemiological data and other intelligence sources.

2. HCHHSD Environmental Health Division personnel will follow routine SOPs when performing vector control activities in the community. If necessary, the Environmental Health Division Manager shall coordinate with TCEQ, the USDA, and other agencies to identify best-practices in response to unique threats. Examples of unique threats include:
 - a. Severe flooding with an extended period of stagnant water, and
 - b. Increased rodent populations following disruption of normal sanitation infrastructure (i.e., disruption in garbage collection or sewage treatment plants).

This list is not inclusive of all possible scenarios resulting in unique vector control issues and the HCHHSD shall collaborate with outside parties as appropriate.

3. The Environmental Health Division Manager, in coordination with the HCHHSD Director, in communication with appropriate vector control subject matter experts, will issue health alerts, press releases, and other information to the public to address vector-based threats to public health (See Public Health and Medical Services, Appendix 2: Communications Plan for methods of communicating public health guidance/communications).
4. The Environmental Health Division Manager will, if necessary, implement Vector Control Teams under the direction of the Incident Commander to support incident response. Such direction shall follow standard ICS practices as described in the Public Health and Medical Services Plan and its appendices.

In a situation that has resulted in foodborne illness, the following objectives need to be addressed immediately:

- a. Identify conditions that may have contributed to the outbreak.
- b. Identify and eliminate the factors that could lead to further transmission.
- c. Clarify the nature and mechanism of disease transmission.
- d. Provide information needed to design effective strategies to prevent future outbreaks.
- e. Evaluate food facilities or water sources.

In a major disaster such as a flood or deliberate terrorist attack, the public water supply system, which includes treatment plants, storage and pumping facilities, and distribution networks could be damaged, interrupted or contaminated. If public water supplies were affected, the following objectives need to be addressed immediately:

- a. Ensure that an adequate supply of safe, potable water will be available to the public.
- b. Prevent outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as typhoid, cholera, dysentery, infectious hepatitis, and others.

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- c. Provide information to the public regarding water safety and supply.
- d. Consider/assess priority of any interventions needed in regulated food service establishments.

In a situation that poses a threat to food safety, the following objectives need to be addressed immediately:

- a. Contact licensed food service facilities to assess the status of each one.
- b. Assure that mass feeding sites also comply with best practices for safe and hygienic food preparation and service.
- c. Ensure that licensed food service facilities can provide for handwashing, ware-washing, safe water, and refrigeration (i.e., generators or dry ice).
- d. Provide information to the public and businesses regarding food safety topics such as: salvaging, sorting and proper disposal.
- e. Provide information/recommendations to help manage donations of food.

In the event that inadequate sanitation poses a health threat to the general public, the following objectives need to be addressed immediately:

- a. Prevent human exposure to, and the spread of, disease-causing microorganisms.
- b. Prevent contamination of water supplies.
- c. Prevent degradation of surface and groundwater quality.

Below are several specific tasks that city and county environmental health professionals could do to minimize health hazards and nuisance conditions posed by vectors (i.e., mosquitoes, flies, ticks, and rodents) associated with a disaster situation:

- a. Assess conditions in the disaster area (e.g., standing water, uncollected and exposed solid waste containing food waste, and a damaged or flooded sewer system) that may promote vector populations.
- b. Work with private and public refuse haulers and municipal staffs to reinstate regular refuse collection or arrange for special pickups.
- c. Contact and work with the Metropolitan Mosquito Control Commission that will apply vector control measures to the affected area.
- d. Provide information to county residents addressing topics such as rodent-transmitted diseases and control measures, avoiding mosquito and tick bites, and insect repellent safety and use.

Disaster situations often result in large volumes of waste or building debris that can overburden the waste management infrastructure and present the following potential public health concerns: insect and rodent harborage; diseases caused by environmental agents (i.e., mold) and chemical contamination. Building debris could be contaminated with asbestos, radioactive particles, lead, mercury, and human remains. In this situation, the following objectives need to be addressed:

- a. Determine the extent of disruption to the solid waste management system.
- b. Provide information about potential public health concerns.

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- c. Ensure proper storage, collection, and management of solid waste.
- d. Provide guidance, oversight, and liaison to businesses and the public.

In the event that a disaster situation occurs in which hazardous waste poses a threat to the public's health, the following objectives need to be addressed immediately:

- a. Identify if hazardous waste generators/facilities are affected.
- b. Determine the lead agency (i.e., local vs. state agency) for specific release.
- c. Provide technical assistance for clean-up activities.
- d. Monitor waste disposal.

In the event that a disaster situation occurs in which medical infectious waste poses a threat to the public's health, the following objectives need to be addressed:

- a. Verify that the facilities are operational and can continue to accept and treat waste on site.
- b. Determine the availability of medical waste transporters.
- c. Ensure continuity of medical waste management services.
- d. Ensure proper storage and management of medical wastes.
- e. Provide information about management of medical wastes.
- f. Inspect medical waste facilities.

In the event that the public's health is threatened by the accidental or deliberate release of a chemical agent, the following objectives need to be addressed immediately:

- a. Work with appropriate emergency responders and governmental agencies to ensure the safety of the public.
- b. Assess whether food safety and water supply sources have been impacted by the incident.
- c. Provide timely information to the public regarding the chemical incident.
- d. Explain contamination and how to decontaminate.

In case of radiological emergencies, the following objectives need to be addressed immediately:

- a. Cooperate with federal agencies; establish an organized and integrated capability for a timely, coordinated response to a radiological emergency.
- b. Specify authorities and the responsibilities of county public health departments in such emergencies.
- c. Provide information to county residents regarding response activities for a radiological emergency.
- d. Ensure availability of immediate medical treatment to those requiring it.
- e. Conduct environmental monitoring and assist in personal monitoring.

In a flood, there are several issues the public must remember in response to the disaster. Many of the activities mirror the Water Safety and Supply Section described previously. The following objectives need to be addressed immediately:

- a. Ensure people are consuming and using safe potable water.
- b. Ensure people are not eating contaminated food.
- c. Provide information to the public about obtaining potable water.
- d. Provide information to the public and licensed facilities describing cleaning and sanitation practices.
- e. Ensure people have water for personal hygiene.

If a situation requires a response beyond environmental health's capacity, the following actions will be conducted:

- a. Request activation of incident command.
- b. Provide input into press release.
- c. Provide just-in-time training.
- d. Provide regular sanitation- status reports to incident command.

Direction & Control

The Director of HCHHSD, working together with Hidalgo County OEM, supported by an appropriate network, will direct and coordinate the efforts of local health and medical services and agencies, and organizations during major emergencies and disasters requiring an integrated response.

Routine health and medical services operations may continue during less severe emergency situations. Direction and control of such operations should be by those that normally direct and control day-to-day health and medical activities.

External agencies providing health and medical support during emergencies are expected to conform to the general guidance provided by our senior decision-makers and carry out mission assignments directed by the IC or the EOC. However, organized response units should normally work under the immediate control of their own supervisors.

Administration & Support

Reporting

In addition to reports that may be required by DSHS organizations, health and medical elements participating in emergency operations should provide appropriate situation reports to the Incident Commander or, if an incident command operation has not been established, to the Health Authority in the EOC. The Incident Commander will forward periodic reports to the EOC.

Pertinent information from all sources will be incorporated into the Initial Emergency Report and the periodic Situation Report that is prepared and disseminated to key officials, other affected jurisdictions, and state agencies during major emergency operations.

Maintenance and Preservation of Records

1. Maintenance of Records

Health and medical operational records generated during an emergency will be collected and filed in an orderly manner. This is so a record of events is preserved for use in determining the possible recovery of emergency operations expenses, response costs, settling claims, assessing the effectiveness of operations, and updating emergency plans and procedures.

2. Documentation of Costs

Expenses incurred in carrying out health and medical services for certain hazards, such as radiological accidents or hazardous materials incidents, may be recoverable from the responsible party. Hence, all departments and agencies will maintain records of personnel and equipment used and supplies consumed during large-scale health and medical operations.

3. Preservation of Records

Vital health & medical records should be protected from the effects of a disaster to the maximum extent possible. Should records be damaged during an emergency situation, professional assistance for preserving and restoring those records should be obtained as soon as possible.

Plan Development & Maintenance

1. The Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Director is responsible for maintaining and reviewing the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan annually. Recommended changes to this plan should be forwarded as needs become apparent and may reflect any changes within our jurisdictional risks and/or community capabilities.
2. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan and its attachments are living documents and require revision to account for changes in roles/responsibilities and resources within Hidalgo County such as the acquisition of new equipment, training of staff, and increased partnerships from the private sector.
3. Once the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan has been updated, the Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department Director will present to Commissioner's Court for final adoption and ratification. The Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan is updated and presented to Commissioner's Court every five years with input from Emergency Management and various stakeholders. Departments and agencies assigned responsibilities in the Public Health & Medical Services Plan are responsible for developing and maintaining SOPs. Copies of the Public Health & Medical Services Plan, Appendix 11: Environmental Health Plan are kept at HCHHSD's main offices at **1304 S. 25th Avenue, Edinburg, TX 78542** in the following locations:

Office of Administration

Public Health Emergency Preparedness Division (PHEP)

Clinical Health Services

Information Technology Services

Safety Officer

Hidalgo County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Hidalgo County Emergency Management Coordinator

Each HCHHSD division manager is responsible for informing and instructing public health personnel about the location of the plan copies, as well as each employee's emergency response role and responsibilities. The supervisors/managers are also responsible for ensuring that employees attend appropriate training, according to their assigned response tier.