

**Using the enHealth
Environmental Health Officer
Skills and Knowledge Matrix**

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Introduction

Environmental health is a broad, multi-level discipline covering a breadth of occupations from environmental health officers and technicians to support workers and scientists.

Public and environmental health legislation establishes the powers of officers to monitor and enforce compliance. Traditionally, legislation specifically referred to EHOs, however it now more frequently describes a role for ‘authorised officers’ who must have appropriate skills and knowledge as a precondition of authorisation

What is the Matrix?

The enHealth Environmental Health Officer Skills and Knowledge Matrix (Matrix) is a nationally agreed description of the skills and knowledge

required to support the breadth of activities undertaken by EHOs. It provides:

- **A description of the skills and knowledge required to undertake the range of EHO roles.** The design of individual job roles may only address some aspects of skills and knowledge held.
- **A statement of common EHO skills and knowledge applying across all states and territories.** As the role varies slightly in different locations, guidance for agencies on contextualising aspects of the Matrix is provided as part of these guidelines.
- **A statement of minimum skills and knowledge required.** The Matrix defines the agreed, minimum skills and knowledge an EHO requires to competently perform the work of an EHO. In some circumstances aspects of the environmental health role may be performed by people in technical roles who have a more limited set of skills and knowledge. This will depend on an assessment of associated risks.

Who should use the Matrix?

The primary purpose of establishing a nationally consistent approach to describing environmental health skills and knowledge is to improve the management and development of the environmental health workforce. It aims to support employers of environmental health workforce to ensure their staff have the required skills and knowledge to manage environmental health risks and protect public health; to assist educators and trainers to provide relevant advice to learners and design training programs to meet professional requirements and to assist current and potential environmental health workers to plan and manage their career development.

Target Audiences	Examples of application
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support selection and recruitment processes • Design jobs to effectively utilise EHO skills • Design induction and ongoing professional development programs to ensure staff have the skills required to manage environmental health risks and protect public health
Educators and trainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design education and training to meet professional needs • Offer recognition of prior learning (RPL) to facilitate career development • Provide detailed advice to prospective students on environmental health roles and opportunities
Environmental health workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and manage personal professional development and career progression
New recruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out about what to expect from environmental health work • Map existing skills and qualifications to environmental health requirements to prepare RPL applications

What does contextualising mean?

In order to apply the Matrix, users will need to know what it means in their specific context – whether that is across a jurisdiction or within a specific workplace. Because the Matrix is a national description, users might need to agree on how it applies to their particular circumstances. This is called ‘contextualising’ the Matrix. When deciding how far or what aspects can be contextualised it is useful to bear in mind some basic principles:

- The Matrix is an agreed, minimum statement of the skills and knowledge requirements of all EHOs. Contextualising allows flexibility to interpret how the content relates in a given environment or situation but does not allow for content to be deleted.
- Whatever changes are made the intent and integrity of the Matrix itself must be retained.
- The Matrix underpins cross recognition and transferable skills and knowledge. Not all aspects may have direct application in a specific context. For example the section on indigenous environmental health relates to working with discrete communities that are often serviced by sub-standard environmental health infrastructure. Depending on where an EHO is located, they may have very little or no opportunity to work in this context. However all jurisdictions agreed that this aspect of environmental health competence should form part of the essential capabilities for all EHOs to encourage transferable skill development and support cross recognition of EHOs who may seek employment in other jurisdictions.

Applying the Matrix

This section looks at how the Matrix can be used by different users including in the workplace; across jurisdictions and education and training providers.

Applying the Matrix in the workplace

Addressing environmental health responsibilities

Why

Agencies have a breadth of environmental health responsibilities often defined by legislation. The Matrix can support organisations to design jobs to fulfil these responsibilities.

How

- Check legislation and agency priorities to identify environmental health-related responsibilities.
- Refer to sections of the Matrix that address relevant activities and review the skills and knowledge required.
- Check that job roles/position descriptions match job responsibilities.

Describing environmental health roles

Why

To improve drafting of position descriptions by providing a common language to describe EHO skills and knowledge.

How

- The first step is to identify broad job roles and responsibilities. The Matrix can be used in different ways to support this outcome. One option is to start by scanning the content to help to outline key job roles. Alternatively, you might already have a clear idea of job requirements. In either case, remember that the Matrix describes the full range of skills and knowledge required by a competent EHO. It would not be practical to exercise this breadth within a single job. Position descriptions describe specific job roles to reflect the requirements and work priorities of an organisation or agency and take account of time and resource constraints.
- Having identified the main role responsibilities, the next step is to check the detail in the Matrix for suggestions about what to include in position descriptions and job advertisements. Do this by reviewing relevant areas of skills and knowledge within the Matrix.
- Adapt information to specifically reflect organisational needs. The Matrix applies to all EHOs, whereas your position descriptions are likely to need more context specific detail. For example, all EHOs need an understanding of the application of public and environmental health legislation. A position description could require knowledge of the specific legislation under which an EHO would act.
- Another aspect you should consider is the level of skill and knowledge you need. The Matrix describes a base level of skills and knowledge applying to all EHOs. It does not describe specialist or advanced skills which may be relevant for a given job role. For example, you might want to engage an EHO with specialist expertise in grey water management or the position might include staff management

responsibilities. You may need to include more detail on these special requirements in your description.

Refer to the example at the end of this guide for more information on how to use the Matrix to develop position descriptions.

Recruiting environmental health staff

Why

To improve environmental health staff selection processes by establishing a common understanding of the breadth of EHO skills and knowledge.

How

- A prerequisite for recruiting staff is the development of a detailed position description to describe specific role requirements.
- Provide interview panel members with the Matrix as background to understanding the breadth of the EHO role.
- Support panel members to explore the depth of required skills and knowledge of applicants.

Building environmental health competence

Why

To support the development of effective induction and ongoing professional development.

Academic courses develop underpinning knowledge of environmental health principles and practices. The workplace has a role to play in building on this foundation to develop applied environmental health competence.

How

- Identify aspects of the Matrix that need to be contextualised for your workplace. For example, an EHO needs an understanding of workplace organisational structure and procedures. These are context-specific and need to be developed in the workplace.

- Design or review induction and mentoring programs to make sure they provide relevant information to new EHOs.
- Review the Matrix to identify aspects of the environmental health knowledge base that are subject to change. Some knowledge relates to general principles or concepts and is unlikely to change. Other aspects are more dynamic such as legislation or emerging technologies that alter the way risks can be controlled.
- Target professional development opportunities that address areas of knowledge that need to be periodically refreshed or updated.

Attracting and retaining environmental health expertise

Why

To design jobs that will attract and retain skilled people. Workforce studies indicate that EHOs are in short supply. One way to attract and retain environmental health expertise is to design attractive environmental health jobs.

How

- Check with environmental health managers about whether your organisation has difficulties attracting or retaining environmental health expertise.
- Interview or survey staff to check whether satisfaction with existing job roles is a factor in attracting and retaining people in these roles.
- Review the suite of skills and knowledge described by the Matrix and determine whether current EHO job design makes effective use of available skills.
- Consult staff about how to design jobs that make more effective use of available skills.

Identifying individual development requirements

Why

To tailor induction and ongoing support and professional development of environmental health workers.

How

- Use the Matrix to support performance review conversations and identify priorities for professional development. These conversations can be based on detailed position descriptions and performance objectives based on a contextualised version of the Matrix to reflect specific roles.

Applying the Matrix across a jurisdiction

Describing EHO requirements when working in a given jurisdiction

Why

To provide guidance about the environmental health role in a specific state or territory. This type of information will be relevant for prospective students or job applicants who may have trained or be transferring from a different jurisdiction and for education and training providers. It should also alert people employing EHOs to check whether a potential employee has skills and knowledge specific to their jurisdiction.

How

- Review Matrix content to identify any additional requirements applying to EHOs in the specific jurisdiction. Typically jurisdiction-specific requirements are listed in the 'optional' section of the Matrix.
One approach to undertaking this task at a jurisdictional level is to establish a key stakeholder panel. Members could include representatives of state, territory and local governments, other agencies engaging EHO staff and professional bodies.
- Develop a contextualised version of the Matrix to reflect any relevant additions applying within a specific jurisdiction. Contextualising means explaining how aspects of the Matrix apply in a specific context. So for example, when applied in

Western Australia, the Matrix requires EHOs to have knowledge of food safety risks relating to meat and seafood.

Use the existing Matrix as a base document. If necessary, insert additional information. When inserting new items into the main body of the Matrix, these should be highlighted so users can easily locate this information.

- Publicise the contextualised version of the Matrix. For example, it could be posted on the departmental website. This information is important for educators and for EHOs who may be transferring from another jurisdiction.
- If this process has required the addition of new information not already contained in the 'optional' section, advise enHealth which is responsible for maintaining ongoing currency of the national Matrix content.

Applying the Matrix to training and education

Strengthening the links between professional requirements and education and training

Why

To establish a nationally consistent set of expectations and outcomes from formal EHO training.

How

- Clearly articulate role requirements so that training providers can design appropriate course content.
- Underpin environmental health course accreditation arrangements.
- Support RPL processes to improve flexibility for people from different academic backgrounds to enter and gain credit for existing learning towards attainment of an environmental health qualification.
- Provide information to career advisors about the scope and content of environmental health work.

Using the Matrix to develop position descriptions

Steps	Which part of the Matrix	Actions
1. Identify broad job roles and responsibilities	Page 4 lists the main headings used to describe skills and knowledge	<p>Review the headings in Parts 1, 2 and 3. Part 1 covers generic skills like teamwork and communication; Part 2 includes areas of knowledge specific to the role. Review these sections and include in knowledge/skill descriptions.</p> <p>Review Part 3 and pick areas of activity you want the position to cover. You can use these as the basis for describing role responsibilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Safe and suitable food: implement Council's policy framework to improve food safety management and enforce legislation</i>
2. Check the detail in the Matrix for suggestions about what to include in position descriptions	Pages 5–17 provide details	<p>Compare existing position descriptions with Matrix content. To be useable documents PDs don't need to list every item. The main headings in the Matrix can provide a guide to streamlining PDs that might be too detailed. You can also check whether there are aspects you might have overlooked.</p>
3. Adapt information to specifically reflect organisational needs.		<p>The Matrix is developed as a national description. You might want to provide more detail about how aspects apply in your workplace. For example under the heading 'Water management' EHOs '<i>Conduct inspections to assess water quality against relevant standards and identify public and environmental health risks.</i>'</p> <p>This could translate into:</p> <p><i>Inspect and sample public swimming pools and recreational pools and spas in non-registered premises</i></p>
4. Check that the description is pitched to the right level.	The Matrix describes a base level of skills and knowledge applying to all EHOs.	<p>You might want to engage an EHO with additional specialist expertise or maybe the position will also have responsibility for managing staff. Think of the Matrix as a starting point to which you can add your organisation's additional requirements.</p>

