

**OPHA – Environmental Health Work Group  
Terms of Reference**

**Background:**

Environmental health is the branch of public health which is concerned with all aspects of the natural and built environment that may affect human health.

Environmental health is defined by the World Health Organization as: “Those aspects of human health and disease that are determined by factors in the environment.” It also refers to the theory and practice of assessing and managing factors in the environment that can potentially affect health. It can include both the direct pathological effects of chemicals, radiation and biological agents and also the effects, often indirect, on health and wellbeing of the broad physical and social environment.

Public health units are engaged in addressing the complex issues and public health impacts related to environmental health such as air, land and water quality, climate change, environmental toxin exposures, consumer product safety and food safety. Public health units have a direct mandate, from the Ontario Public Health Standards (2008) to address these issues through a number of public health programs (environmental health, child health, reproductive health and chronic disease prevention).

Ontario Public Health Program Standards outline specific goal statements for these programs that have environmental health implications:

Chronic Disease Prevention	To reduce the burden of preventable chronic diseases of public health importance (cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory diseases and Type II diabetes).
Reproductive Health:	To enable individuals and families to achieve optimal preconception health, experience a healthy pregnancy, have the healthiest newborn(s) possible and be prepared for parenthood.
Child Health	To enable all children to attain and sustain optimal health and developmental potential.
Food Safety	To prevent or reduce the burden of food-borne illness.
Safe Water	To prevent or reduce the burden of water-borne illness related to drinking water. To prevent or reduce the burden of water-borne illness and injury related to recreational water use.
Health Hazard Prevention and Management	To prevent or reduce the burden of illness from health hazards in the physical environment.

In order to improve the health of Ontarians, there is a need for public health to work with municipalities, provincial ministries, professional organizations and other national and community partners to protect and promote health.

**Purpose:**

To work collaboratively to improve the health of the public as it is impacted by environmental health factors through project participation, research and advocacy to promote healthy public policy.

**Primary Activities:**

The Environmental Health Workgroup will focus on the following types of activities in order to accomplish its purpose:

1. Advocacy
2. Health Promotion
3. Policy Development
4. Partnerships
5. Alignment with OPHA strategic directions

Task groups will be developed to work on environmental health issues.

**Membership**

Membership is open to staff of local public health units in Ontario and members of organizations who collaborate with public health units on issues that affect health outcomes associated with the built environment.

The workgroup will collaborate with others actively researching and working on environmental health issues. The workgroup will have two types of membership – *participating members and information only members*. “*Participating*” members will attend at least two meetings per year and will participate on at least one task group per year. They will be involved in ongoing workgroup discussions and decision making. “*Information Only*” members will receive e-mail updates about the activities of the workgroup through the Environmental Health Workgroup list serve. Decisions will be arrived at through consensus of “Participating” members.

**Chair**

The chair will have a two year term which can only be renewed once. The chair is responsible for calling the meetings, preparing agendas, reporting to the OPHA board, acting as an intermediary between the workgroup and the OPHA executive director, liaising with other workgroups on issues which overlap mandates, maintaining a list of workgroup members, and preparing an annual workplan and budget.

**Recorder**

The recorder is responsible for taking and distributing the minutes. This task will be rotated at each meeting.

**Accountability and Reporting**

The Workgroup is accountable to the Executive Director and the Board of Directors of OPHA. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed at the first meeting each year and/or as necessary.

**Meetings**

Meetings are held quarterly at a minimum. To demonstrate our commitment to building healthy communities, meetings will be by teleconference or webinar with agendas being sent out two weeks in advance. Face to face meetings will be no more than once per year, with the workgroup identifying ways to offset greenhouse gas emissions from vehicle distance travelled.

Revised: March 31, 2010