



Australian Institute of Environmental Health

... our environment, our health, our future

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Media Release

10th World Congress on Environmental Health 'Environmental Health: a sustainable future – 20 years on'

As many Australians reflect on the 20th anniversary of World Expo 1988, a group of Australians is preparing for another 20 year anniversary. The Inaugural World Congress on Environmental Health was held in Sydney in 1988 and coincided with the World Expo. Whilst this event would be unknown to most people, it enabled environmental health professionals from all around the world to come together and discuss emerging issues. This too may seem unremarkable, until we consider that environmental health impacts on every person every day, and that the issues discussed 20 years ago helped prepare environmental health professionals to tackle issues that we now face.

Environmental health, which involves the impact of the built and natural environment on human health and well-being, is constantly evolving. In his opening address at the Inaugural World Congress on Environmental Health, the then Governor-General of Australia, Sir Ninian Stephen, referred to '... new problems undreamed of even 20 or 30 years ago. New hazards to health, in some cases even to continued life on earth, have been identified – all the way from free asbestos fibres installed as insulation in our roofs and walls, through chemical insecticides that can contaminate our food products, to the possibility of large-scale fossil fuel usage causing world-wide climatic change and raised sea levels and that other possibility of chemical damage to the ozone layer vastly increasing the incidence of skin cancers.'⁽¹⁾

The difference 20 years has made is obvious. Issues such as asbestos-related illness and insecticide exposure are now widely recognised and better understood. Climate change is no longer seen as a 'possibility' but a reality that requires urgent global action.

In celebration of the 20 year anniversary of the Inaugural World Congress on Environmental Health, Australia is hosting the 10th World Congress on Environmental Health in Brisbane from 11-16 May 2008. The Congress is hosted by the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) and the Australian Institute of Environmental Health (AIEH). In recognition of the 20th anniversary of the Inaugural Congress, the theme for the 2008 Congress is 'Environmental Health, a sustainable future – 20 years on...'

In a letter of welcome and support for the 2008 Congress, the Queensland Premier Anna Bligh MP, states 'The challenges the world faces in our quest for a sustainable future have not diminished over the years, but they have changed'. She notes that 'By reflecting on the battles won over the past 20 years and the new challenges we face, environmental health professionals and governments across the globe can work together and move towards a more sustainable future'⁽²⁾.

Dr Peter Davey, Chair of the IFEH 10th World Congress on Environmental Health, notes that 'it was a privilege for Australia to host the Inaugural World Congress on Environmental Health in 1988, and it is an even greater privilege for us to be hosting this Congress 20 years on'. 'The congress program includes addresses from Professor Ian Lowe of Griffith University and Professor Valerie Brown of the Australian National Sustainability Initiative, as well as international speakers such as Dr Hisashi Ogawa of the World Health Organisation, and many other world-class presenters' he said. Topics such as climate change and sustainability, environmental management, pollution, water quality, food safety, indigenous health, communicable disease control and disaster management will be discussed during the Congress.

Dr Jim Smith, President of the AIEH, notes that: 'Environmental health is a dynamic field which has changed a lot since the Inaugural World Congress in 1988. At the Inaugural Congress, climate change was noted as a possibility, whereas in this Congress several of the speakers will be calling for action to address climate change in recognition that it is now a reality.' 'During the Congress, environmental health professionals from all around the world will be considering what environmental health challenges we're likely to face in the future. Environmental health professionals proactively consider these issues so that we can try to prevent or minimise the negative impacts associated with these issues, and help protect or improve the health and well-being of the community.' he said. Dr Smith also noted that 'it is anticipated that the knowledge shared, relationships strengthened and action arising from this World Congress on Environmental Health will help to build a sustainable future for us all.'

References:

1. Stephen, N. 1988, 'Official opening address', *Inaugural World Congress of Environmental Health Proceedings*, 26-30 September 1988, p.13.
2. Bligh, A. 2008, 'Message from the Premier', *The International Federation of Environmental Health 10th World Congress on Environmental Health*, www.ifeh2008.org/docs/84828IFEHProgram.pdf.

Relevant publications and resources:

- International Foundation of Environmental Health (IFEH) 10th World Congress on Environmental Health:
 - <http://www.ifeh2008.org/index.php>
- 10th World Congress on Environmental Health program:
 - www.ifeh2008.org/docs/84828IFEHProgram.pdf

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