

GENERIC TERMS OF REFERENCE - Environmental Expert Emergency Missions UN Environment/OCHA Joint Unit

Disasters and complex emergencies often result in significant secondary environmental impacts. Firstly, natural hazards such as earthquakes and floods, as well as conflicts, can damage industrial infrastructure, causing the release of hazardous materials. These secondary impacts can pose immediate, life-threatening risks to humans (both local communities and responders), as well as longer-term challenges to the environment. Secondly, disasters and conflicts may cause negative impact on ecosystems and agriculture – causing landslides and damaging crops, forests, watersheds and/or depleting natural assets. Disasters and conflicts can also give rise to significant amounts of disaster waste, which needs to be quickly addressed in order to expedite the humanitarian response and promote sustainable recovery. Finally, the humanitarian response operations may, unless properly assessed and managed, pose risks to natural resource use, for example through increased use of wood, water and other natural resources.

Therefore, a key element of humanitarian response is the rapid identification and mitigation of secondary environmental impacts following all disasters and conflicts. The objectives of an emergency mission to address these issues include conducting a general evaluation of the risks posed by the disaster to humans and the environment. Of critical importance is identifying any gaps in the assistance being provided, and making recommendations on possible additional international assistance requirements.

In case there is a request for international assistance is received from the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator or the authorities, the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit would forward such a request to the operational focal point of the environmental emergency response partner, in accordance with the Guidelines for Environmental Emergencies. If the sponsoring organization agrees to respond to this request, it would deploy the environmental expert (at no cost to the requesting country) with a United Nations international mission (including UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams).

The main task of an Environmental Expert is to rapidly identify secondary environmental impacts and risks, as described below.

Responsibilities

- Under the overall guidance of the (UNDAC) team leader, identify and assess secondary environmental hazards and impacts following sudden-onset disasters, with emphasis on those that pose immediate life-threatening risks to humans (both local communities and responders);
- As required, identify and assess medium and long-term issues that need to be addressed in the humanitarian programme cycle, for example ground water pollution, disaster waste management, use of natural resources and environmental aspects of shelter;
- When applicable, identify environmental implications of relief operations (e.g. over-exploitation of scarce water resources);

- Coordinate with disaster responders and local emergency management authorities to identify significant environmental issues in relation to the humanitarian response.

Expected Actions

- Gather, consolidate and analyze environmental assessment data and provide recommendations to the national and local authorities and the UN Resident Coordinator (or equivalent) to minimize and/or mitigate secondary impacts and promote the integration of appropriate actions into the overall disaster response strategy – in coordination with national and local actors with access to environmental data and assessments;
- Analyze standard assessment data for environmental dimensions, participating in assessment design and the Multi Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) process, conducting specific environmental assessments to sites of concern;
- Support liaison with national and international counterparts working on environmental issues, including organizations working on disaster waste, natural resource management and chemical hazards – facilitating information-exchange between the relevant actors;
- Communicate rapidly and regularly all findings to the UN Environment / OCHA Joint Unit, emphasizing the possible need for additional specialized expertise (e.g. related to dams, slope stability, waste management, specific chemical hazards, natural resource management) and/or additional equipment (e.g. ECHO Environment Assessment Module, disaster waste management support) as required;
- Identify, where applicable, pre-existing contributing environmental factors to the disasters (e.g. deforestation, poor urban planning, lack of prevention and preparedness in environmental sector);
- Provide a support function on environmental issues to the UNDAC team;
- Prepare an exit strategy and carry out hand-over activities in order to allow for any continued environmental support in later stages of the humanitarian programme cycle

Note: Contact with media, including interviews, will only be undertaken in collaboration with the team leader and the local United Nations communication / media focal points.

Qualifications and skills

- Ability to integrate environmental considerations across disciplines/clusters, and specifically into disaster response, while prioritizing environmental impacts within the framework of humanitarian objectives;
- Ability to distinguish immediate response actions from medium to long-term mitigation, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities;
- Familiarity with rapid environmental assessment tools and frameworks (including MIRA) and ability to conduct rapid environmental assessments using the Flash Environmental Assessment Tool (FEAT) in disasters;
- Familiarity with "humanitarian architecture" and the cluster system;
- Completed training course on Environment and Emergencies (of stand-by partner, UNDAC system, JEU response partner and/or other organization) is an asset
- Familiarity with identification, storage, transport, handling and production of hazardous materials;
- Familiarity with management of operational support functions including telecommunications, logistics and basic field security;

- Ability to coordinate with international and local agencies involved in disaster response;
- Ability to rapidly assess basic needs and local capacities (for example women's local knowledge of environmental resources) of affected populations;
- High motivation, coupled with an ability to improvise effectively in rapidly changing situations with minimal guidance and support;
- Team skills required for working in a multi-disciplinary, multi-national team in field conditions of hardship with an ability to assume authority as and when needed;
- Availability for short-notice mobilization (within 6 to 48 hours) and must be able to stay in the field for up to 3 weeks;
- Background in environmental sciences, environmental health, chemistry, disaster management, engineering, industrial safety, handling of hazardous materials, or related fields;
- Fluency in the English language (essential); working knowledge of other languages, particularly French or Spanish as well as other languages (asset);
- Knowledge of MS Windows and MS Office and ability to operate standard IT and communications equipment.