

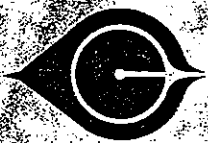
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# Environment

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

## THE ROAD TO HEALTH

...or is the frog's  
chorus the sweetest  
sound this side of  
extinction?



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# ENVIRONMENTAL

# HEALTH OFFICER

## roles into 21st Century

Kristie Rosewarne

displays at shopping centres, providing information to industry on cleaner production and environmental management, writing articles for newspapers and much more. However, there are still hindrances in the necessary expansion of the environmental health role. While everyone realises that we can't continue to deplete our natural resources or adversely alter the environment, some departments are finding it difficult to break old habits.

There is an urgent need for greater communication and input between Council departments. This is starting to occur via the development of Public and Environmental Health Management Plans and Local Agenda 21 Plans. These documents are strategic planning documents that identify problems in the Council area, prioritise them, identify time lines for their completion and identify who is responsible for developing and carrying out strategies to resolve the issue.

Community involvement plays a large part in the development of these documents, initially in identifying problems to be addressed or activities to be done, later reviewing the draft documents, actual involvement in undertaking the work where possible, e.g. storm water monitoring and tree planting, and revision of the documents. These documents are revised and updated annually with strategies achieved being removed and new ones added, resulting in a cyclic process of continual improvement in the local government area.

Getting Council Departments to work together is hard enough, but we need to look at the issues on a regional and state basis as well. Environmental problems do not stop at Council boundaries. The result of the lack of coordination and forward planning on a regional basis has resulted in the poor management and degradation of the environment, e.g. coastal and catchment areas.

Support is required from all levels, be they federal, state and local government, large corporations, small businesses and residents. Everyone has a role to play. If you would like to be involved or find out more about what is happening in your area please contact an Environmental Health Officer in your local Council.

by **Jodi M Smith**, B.App.Sci.  
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IN THE PAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT HAS DONE LITTLE TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICERS (EHOs) PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS HEALTH INSPECTORS OR HEALTH SURVEYORS, WERE EMPLOYED TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF THE PUBLIC, BUT THEY HAD LITTLE INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING OR ISSUES IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS. ENGINEERS DESIGNED DRAINAGE, ROADS, AND STREET SWEEPING. BUILDING AND PLANNING APPROVED DEVELOPMENTS. ALL THESE ACTIONS AFFECT THE ENVIRONMENT.

The results of this divided approach are tragic. The environment was only considered in so much as it affected humans; it was not valued inherently. Consequently

native vegetation was removed, wetlands were filled in and built on, and the infamous concrete channels were built. Trees, while beautifying the area, were

sometimes seen as troublesome plants that damaged roads and footpaths.

Thankfully these attitudes are changing and Councils are now realising that they do have a large role to play in environmental health – not just protection of the public's health but the environment and human health are inextricably connected.

The result is an expanding role for the EHO in environmental protection and management. The reactive role of the EHO involves following up complaints regarding illegal

stormwater discharges, noise and odour emissions. These areas are also the responsibility of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Local

### Councils are now realising that they do have a large role to play in environmental health

Government EHOs work with EPA Officers to ensure a quick response to complaints. At the moment EHOs can only be authorised under the water and burning sections of the Environment Protection Act; this limits their role.

The proactive roles of EHOs involve activities such as giving presentations at schools and community centres,