

Shelter Cluster

Environmental Advisor

of the Shelter Coordination Team (SCT)

The SCT is a flexible team, deployed by the IFRC to coordinate the Shelter Cluster in response to natural disasters during the emergency phase.

Its composition varies upon the size and needs of a disaster, ranging from a 2 to 20 person team. The key roles of the SCT include the following:

- Cluster coordinator
- Information manager
- Technical coordinator
- Recovery advisor

Additional roles can be deployed as required.

Background

After a disaster, environmental considerations are a key aspect in achieving a sustainable and effective shelter response, as well as reducing future risk and vulnerability. In the shelter coordination team (SCT), the environmental advisor evaluates and provides practical, solution-oriented techniques for integrating an environmentally sustainable approach to the shelter response. This case study outlines the role of the environmental advisor, key activities and the impact of this role on the Shelter Cluster.



The role of environmental advisor

An environmentally sustainable approach to recovery after a disaster has a positive impact on the provision of shelter assistance. With an expertise in the field of environmental sciences and natural resource management, the environmental advisor evaluates the context of a response, and provides necessary guidance and technical advice to shelter agencies on a range of issues including shelter materials, transport and logistics, water and sanitation, and disaster risk reduction. He/she communicates and advocates both internally to the Shelter Cluster, and externally among other clusters and humanitarian agencies such as the UN Environmental Programme, for the integration of an environmentally sustainable approach to the response.

Main Activities

Identifying environmental aspects of emergency shelter

Emergency shelter materials distributed by the Shelter Cluster include timber poles, tarpaulins and tents, among others. In order to minimise negative consequences on the environment – particularly when a substantial quantity is needed – the environmental advisor together with other humanitarian agencies evaluates sources of procurement and methods for decommissioning, including logistics and transportation. During the Haiti earthquake response of 2010 for example, the advisor developed a partnership with a local recycling company in order to responsibly dispose of tarpaulins. The environmental advisor provided guidance notes for shelter agencies on the reuse, recycling and disposal of the plastic sheeting, in place of using dumpsites or burning the materials.



Identifying environmental aspects of construction

The sustainable and legal sourcing of timber, sand and gravel for construction are some of the issues the environmental advisor evaluates. The advisor works with shelter agencies to review the procurement process, including transportation and logistics - whether it is local or international - and encourages the adaptation of an environmentally sustainable approach. If necessary, she/she will propose relevant solutions such as reforestation programmes.

Promotion of environmentally sustainable locations and conditions

Shelter provides a measure of critical assistance after a disaster, but it is fundamentally linked to other elements such as location, water and sanitation, energy, livelihoods and disaster risk reduction. Common environmental complications associated with emergency camps or other shelter sites include the blockage of natural drains and waterways, indiscriminate solid waste dumping and increased erosion. The advisor works with agencies to ensure locations for construction do not exploit natural resources, pollute the environment, or cause environmental

degradation. He/she may use the *Environmental Assessment Checklist for Shelter*¹ tool in order to identify and mitigate impacts.

Investigating environmental aspects of debris management and permanent shelter construction

Depending on the context and type of disaster, shelter agencies are often responsible for the sustainable management of debris in sites where they develop or manage shelter. The environmental advisor will work with shelter agencies and the SCT – specifically the debris manager – to support efforts for the environmentally sustainable disposal of debris, or the reuse of debris for cement blocks, gravel, etc. to construct sustainable shelter sites or permanent shelter.



The debris advisor meets with the owner of a local recycling plant (facilitated by the environmental advisor), in order to investigate alternative methods of construction, including the reuse of plastic bottles.

Communication, advocacy and partnership building

At the same time the environmental advisor researches environmental issues and provides solution-oriented techniques for shelter agencies, the advisor actively communicates and advocates his/her work with both internal and external partners. The environmental advisor provides resources for information through workshops, guidance documents, and other environmental references, which are always made available on the Shelter Cluster website. Environment-related training tools such as the *Environment Assessment Checklist for Shelter* and the *Green Recovery and Reconstruction Toolkit (GRRT)*² are disseminated with the guidance of the environmental advisor. Advocacy for an environmentally sustainable approach to the response is also channeled through relationship building with government counterparts such as the Ministry of Public works, Ministry of Environment, and external partners including the Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster and other humanitarian agencies.

1 Prepared by ProAct and CARE international

2 Prepared by WWF and American Red Cross. Toolkit available at <http://www.green-recovery.org>

Impact

- Rebuilding after a disaster presents an opportunity for communities to be more environmentally sustainable than they might have been before. The contributions of the environmental advisor provide valuable expertise that guides shelter agencies in adapting and integrating sustainable shelter services for beneficiaries. The advisor's role complements the provision of shelter in the emergency, transitional and permanent phase, adding a critical ecological dimension to the humanitarian response, increasing community resilience and security.
- An environmental approach to water and sanitation, shelter location and resourcing of materials not only benefits communities and reduces their vulnerability to future disasters, but it makes programming more sustainable. Emergency and transitional shelter sites and resources will last longer and function more effectively if considerations for the environment are incorporated into the response.
- The contributions of the environmental advisor reinforce the value of the SCT within the Shelter Cluster. In previous deployments, the environmental advisor received strong support for environmentally sustainable initiatives from government officials, as well as shelter agencies and external partners.



**For further information,
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For more on the Humanitarian Reform, the role of the IFRC as convener of the Shelter Cluster and the SCT, please visit www.sheltercluster.org