

**Address by Honourable Ivor Stephenson Parliamentary  
Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Environment with  
special responsibility for the Environment marking  
Environmental Health Month 2015**

Fellow Dominicans

This year the Environmental Health Department will celebrate Environmental Health Month from June 1st to 30th 2015 under the theme “*Protecting Our Environment for Future Generations*”. The Department envisages maintaining a healthy environment as central to increasing the quality of life, and years of healthy life in Dominica.

The focus will be on issues of Food Safety with special emphasis on Fish Sanitation, Vector Control and Occupational Health and Safety.

This initiative is being undertaken to increase awareness of the public on health issues; to develop workplace accident/ injury and disease surveillance system; to promote community participation in vector control programs and forge greater collaboration among stake holders and the community in general.

The goal of the Department is to promote health for all through a healthy environment. Humans interact with the environment constantly and these interactions affects the quality of life, years of healthy life lived and health disparities

The World Health Organization defines the environment as it relates to health as “all the physical, chemical and biological factors external to a person and all the related behaviors”. Environmental Health involves preventing or controlling disease, injury, and disability related to the interactions between people and their environment.

The Environmental Health strategic plan prioritize the following areas for action in 2014-2016

***1. Vector Control***

***2. Liquid and Solid Waste***

***3. Food Safety/Port Health /Communicable Diseases***

***4. Occupational Health and Safety***

***5. Drinking /Recreational Water***

***6. Institutional Health***

***7. Homes and Community Health***

Globally, nearly 25 percent of all deaths and the total disease burden can be attributed to environmental factors. Environmental factors are diverse and far reaching. Thus we have placed emphasis on three factors; Occupational Health and Safety, Food Safety with focus on Fish Sanitation and Vector Control. We see the need to consistently maintain awareness among our population in order to drive positive behaviors for healthy environments

Poor environmental quality has its greatest impact on people whose health status is already at risk. Therefore, environmental health must address the societal and

environmental factors that increase the likelihood of exposure and diseases. These include the following:

## **OCCUPATION HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The main link between the workplace and the general environment is that the source of the hazard is usually the same, whether it is an agricultural activity or an industrial activity. Our inspections of workplaces revealed inadequate data collection on injuries and accidents. To rectify this data gap Environmental Health Department will be collaborating with the Division of Labour and other major stakeholders dealing with workers health to conduct a National consultation to develop a surveillance system for injuries and accidents at the workplace during our month of activity

## **FOOD SAFETY**

Despite progress in science and technology, contaminated food and water remain to this day major public health problems. Foodborne diseases are perhaps the most widespread health problems in the contemporary world and important causes of reduced economic productivity (WHO/FAO 1984). They are caused by a wide range of agents, and cover all degrees of severity, from mild indispositions to life-threatening illnesses. However, only a small proportion of cases come to the notice of health services and even fewer are investigated.

The Government of Dominica over the last decade and half has made food safety a public health priority. This is being attained by developing policies and regulatory framework with the aim of establishing and implementing effective food safety

systems that ensure food producers and suppliers along the food whole food chains operate responsibly and supply safe food to consumers.

The Environmental Health Department over the period mentioned placed emphasis on;

- education and certification of food handlers
- Inspection and Certification of Food Establishments
- Inspection and certification of Meat and Other Foods
- Education of Consumers

Notwithstanding the achievements articulated, food safety continues to be a challenge. This year we collaborated with Fisheries Division to promote fish hygiene standards among our fisher folks for World Health Day. We intend to intensify this campaign during the Environmental Health month by holding town hall meetings at Fond Cole, Mahaut, Scotts Head, Marigot and Fond St. Jean with the objective of informing the public on fish sanitation and actions required by consumers for adherence of these standards.

One of the main activities of this Environmental Health month will be holding of workshops with executive members of 13 Fisheries Cooperatives of Dominica. The objective is to inform management personnel on Food Safety Regulations and Standards in the Fishing Industry.

## **The third factor is VECTOR CONTROL**

Over the last ten years Dominica has realized the re-emergence of vector-borne diseases which threatens to negatively impact the health of the population and the Dominican economy. The health system recorded several hundred cases of Dengue Fever including more than five hundred cases of the disease in 2010, over 70 cases of leptospirosis from 2010 to 2015 and a devastating outbreak of the Chikungunya virus in 2014-15. The country is at risk for the spread of Malaria, West Nile Virus and Zika Virus since the vectors transmitting these diseases are present on the island and the diseases are endemic in regional countries. These vector-borne diseases have the potential to overwhelm the country's capacity to respond.

In view of the serious health risks and harm from the vectors that transmit these diseases, and recognizing the limited availability of effective drugs and vaccines for the treatment of some of them, infection prevention and vector control are essential to reducing the burden of vector-borne diseases.

An Integrated Vector Control Plan has been developed promoting a collaborative approach to manage vector-borne diseases. Other activities planned for Environment Health Month are; Community clean up campaigns, education walk-thru in communities with high *Aedes aegypti* infestation and holding of a National Workshop on Pest Management for managers and Supervisors of Food Establishments.

In closing we need to ponder on the words of second stanza our national anthem which commands us to be stewards of our environment. I quote, "**DOMINICA GOD HAS BLESS THESE WITH A CLIME BENIGN AND BRIGHT, PASTURES GREEN AND**

**FLOWERS OF BEAUTY, FILLING ALL WITH PURE DELIGHT, AND A PEOPLE STRONG AND HEALTHY FULL OF GODLY REVERENCE FEAR, MAY WE EVER SEEK TO PRAY THESE .FOR THESE GIFTS SO RICH AND RARE"**

The author of this great anthem clearly articulates the responsibility our god has entrusted us with having stewardship over our land. We must continue to exhibit behavioral actions which promote healthy environments.

Citizens of Dominica here are some calls to action which will contribute to healthy people and a sustainable environment;

*-Promotion of composting and reuse of solid waste*

*-Limit use of toxic chemicals in food production*

*-consumption of wholesome foods*

*-Increase production of organic foods*

*-Avoid pollution of our rivers and marine waters with waste, soil and chemicals*

*-Water containers provide housing for the Aedes aegypti Mosquitoes, keep them covered when not in use*

*-adoption of cleaner energy to reduce the impact of climate change*

Promotion of a safe environment must become part of our culture. It must be nature at schools and maintain at our workplaces and our communities. Past Generations left this island on a sound environmental footing, the onus is now upon us to leave Dominica on a better environmental health platform for future generations.

A Productive Environmental Health Month to all.

Thank you. God Bless Dominica.