

Emergency Shelter Cluster

**Emergency Shelter Policy with Regards to
Environmental Issues**
(Revision 1)¹

Developed under the
*Integrating Critical Environmental Issues into
Emergency Shelter Cluster Activities Project*
ProAct and CARE International

Funded by
Emergency Shelter Cluster
Under
UNHCR Project CLUS-07/ESC04

¹ Drafted by C. Kelly, ProAct Network, email: 72734.2412@compuserve.com

I. Purpose

This document identifies expected key environment-related policies issues which should be incorporated into an overall Emergency Shelter Cluster policy statement on relief and recovery in the shelter sector following a disaster.

II. Reference Points

1. Shelter refers to the structures which are directly used for protection from environmental conditions, as a location for basic, productive and social activities which impact on and use resources from the environment, and as a place where physical possessions are used and stored.
2. Sphere Standards call for minimizing negative environmental impacts of shelter activities (Shelter Standard 6).
3. Good practice relief assistance avoids or minimizes further environmental damage from the use of natural resources for shelter reconstruction.
4. Disaster survivors construct most emergency, transitional and permanent shelter.
5. Populations receiving shelter assistance should be consulted on the environmental aspects of the assistance being provided (See Sphere Common Standard One). Where possible, beneficiary populations should be allowed to make decisions as to:
 - a. How shelter-related natural resource needs will be met, and
 - b. How negative impacts will be mitigated when these may occur as part of the shelter provision effort.
6. Immediately available resources (including materials from damaged buildings) are a primary source of emergency and often transitional shelter.
7. Shelter is a livelihood base for many disaster survivors. Rebuilding shelter quickly promotes livelihood recovery.
8. Post-disaster shelter construction can significantly increase natural resource extraction rates, leading to environmental damage.
9. A better incorporation of environmental issues into shelter activities usually results in better shelter assistance.
10. Responsibility for environment, as a cross-cutting issue, rests with the Emergency Shelter Cluster Coordinator.
11. Reference materials exist on shelter impact assessment², and environmentally sound use of some shelter materials³, and are being developed for other aspects of shelter assistance.
12. Decisions on providing shelter-related assistance should consider the environment-related health impacts of the assistance. For instance, wood preservatives and treatments (including used motor oil) may have negative health and well as negative environmental

² See http://www.benfieldhrc.org/rea_index.htm under Shelter.

³ **Timber: A guide to the planning, use, procurement and logistics of timber as a construction material in emergencies**, January 2007, UN OCHA, and www.Plastic-sheeting.org.

impacts. Special attention should be given to a decision to use of asbestos sheeting, which has been banned in some countries on the grounds of health risk.

III. Policy Guidelines

1. The siting and construction of post-disaster shelter should be based on the standards and guidance provided in Sphere Standards Chapter 4, Shelter, including Standard 6.
2. Environmental impact reviews are required for post-disaster shelter activities. Reviews can be programmatic (for a whole emergency shelter operation) or project specific (e.g., site-specific checklists). The Emergency Cluster Coordinator is responsible for ensuring these reviews are conducted and how best they can be accomplished.
3. Negative environmental impacts associated with the provision of post-disaster shelter should be mitigated.
4. Materials from damaged buildings and damaged vegetation should be considered as a first source for shelter construction and the use of these materials maximized.
5. Post-disaster debris clean-up activities (often associated with emergency shelter operations) should be based on recovering reusable materials, including the specific segregation of materials for reuse in emergency shelter, and the minimization of the volume of materials disposed of in land fills or through other means.
6. The use of locally available natural resources (e.g., sand, grass, wood) for shelter should be assessed for the impact on the local availability and sustainable use of these resources.
7. The environmental sustainability of non-local shelter resources (e.g., roofing sheets, processed lumber, metal rods) should be assessed as part of programmatic planning for shelter. Where possible, sustainable sources should be used for all non-local shelter resources.
8. Emergency or transitional shelter structures and associated facilities should be designed to be deconstructed and all materials involved reused for shelter or other productive purposes.
9. Shelter materials should not be ordered or allowed to be shipped to a disaster affected area unless the specific need for these materials is justified by:
 - a. A field assessment,
 - b. An assessment-based shelter reconstruction plan, or
 - c. A pre-disaster response plan which estimates post disaster shelter requirements.
10. The means used to ship shelter-related materials to a disaster area should be selected based on an assessment of:
 - The urgency with which the material is needed to save or maintain life and,
 - The environmental impact of the means of transportation used for the shipment.

In general, the environmental impact is lowest with the use of water-borne transport and increases with each of the following means: rail, road, airplane, helicopter. An analysis of transport options can be performed on a programmatic (Cluster-level) or project basis.

11. Where possible, the carbon contribution of the means used to transport emergency shelter assistance should be calculated and off-sets incorporated into project budgets. These off-

sets can be accomplished through the purchase of off-sets or through project-based activities (e.g., tree planting).

12. Shelter-associated livelihood recovery aid (e.g., training, tools), should incorporate an environmental impact assessment of how beneficiaries will use these skills or tools. This assessment can be performed at a programmatic level, with impact mitigation measures identified for implementation at the project level.
13. Post-disaster shelter activities should identify and incorporate analysis of environmental impact from other sectors (e.g. WASH, CCCM, Early Recovery, Camp Management). Cross-sector coordination should be formalized (i.e., a written responsibilities) where communal shelter occurs (e.g., camps), and a common structure for assistance is required to limit negative environmental impacts.
14. Assessment of the environmental impacts of immediate post disaster shelter assistance should incorporate consideration of the longer term recovery and reconstruction environmental impacts. Where these impacts cannot be accurately defined due to a lack of data or unclear reconstruction plans, possible issues should be signaled and noted for follow-up by the Early Recovery Cluster, or other appropriate party.