

2019 Tribal Environmental Health Forum

By: Marti Lindsey



Artwork by: Dwayne Manuel (On'k Akimel O'odham)

The 3rd bi-annual Tribal Environmental Health Sciences Forum was a great success in 2019. Held at Hotel Tucson on February 27, 2019, members of the Environmental Health community came together to discuss research and hear from colleagues and community members. It expanded appreciation and engagement of Indigenous voices about various topics that touch on tribal responses to disasters; such as floods, contamination of waterways, and research processes concerning disasters. The forum bridged diverse knowledges, broadened skills and understanding of environmental science, and health by joining professions and tribal communities together in learning and discussion.

The forum brought nearly 200 individuals from various backgrounds, communities, expertise, and departments to convene, creating a safe and intimate setting for fellow professionals, colleagues, and friends. Disaster experts and students presented and shared knowledge, models, opportunities, and ways of collecting data and conducting research through panel sessions and posters. Edward Manuel, Chairman of Tohono O'odham Nation and Gabriel L. Lopez, Vice-Chairman of the Ak-Chin Indian Community told stories of flooding from Hurricane Rosa in 2018.



TO Nation Chairman Edward Manuel

The sessions ranged from the Impacts of Climate Change and Disasters to Personal Stories of 2018 Flooding in Tribal Communities. The Emergency Managers/Public Health Officers presented what Tribes are doing to plan for and to recover from disasters and participants completed an exercise about Incident Command Structures. To address Disaster Research, there were presentations about the Indigenous Inquiry Framework, the Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response, known as CASPER, and Data to Collect during and after a Disaster. Perhaps the most captivating presentation was the community panel where members from various communities presented on their personal experiences with disasters in their community. These personal stories showed the emotional distress individuals undergo during disasters, an aspect often overlooked in the disaster response research field.

The planning committee was comprised of tribal partners from the Ak-Chin Indian Community, the Gila River Indian Community, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and the Tohono O'odham Nation. They were joined by partners from the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, Indigenous Strategies, staff members of the Southwest Environmental Health Sciences Center, the Native American Research and Training Center, the Southwest Climate Adaptation Science Center and the Rural Health Professions Program. Together the tribal partners and organizations all participated to plan and execute the 2019 Tribal Environmental Health Forum to make it successful.

The Forum was comprised of people who care deeply for the Earth and want this planet to last for as long as possible. The main focus of this forum, and of environmental health in general, is to learn and take measures to create a long-lasting planet for generations to come. The only ones who can make this a possibility are the people who live on Earth, it is our job to come together and preserve Mother Earth.



Community Panel (from left to right): Dr. Karletta Chief, Chili Yazzie, Ophelia Rivas, Gabriel Lopez

Panel on the Indigenous Inquiry Framework (from left to right): Kyle Harvey, Melodie Lopez, Cheyenne Grabiec