

TRACKING

A Map to Better Health: *Success Stories of CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program*

TRACKING: An Overview

Environmental public health tracking is the ongoing collection, integration, analysis, interpretation, and distribution of data about environmental hazards, exposures, and their possible health effects. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network unites these types of data from federal, state, and local partners into one dynamic resource.

With funding from CDC, health departments in 23 states and one city are at the forefront of developing the Tracking Network. These health departments feed local data into the Tracking Network, allowing users to generate information on environmental public health hazards in a way never done before.

The Tracking Network gives users the ability to compare state and local data, discover emerging trends, measure progress, and better direct effective and cost-saving public health interventions. It is also strengthening the capacity of public health professionals to successfully address preventable health problems.

In addition, the Tracking Network offers a new way for community members to take a larger role in protecting their own health, offering personal risk information and prevention tips in easily accessible and friendly formats.

Keeping Track, Promoting Health... Connecting the Dots

hazard >> exposure >> health effect



Before CDC launched its Tracking Network, no such system existed in the United States. This gap meant that public health professionals were lacking key data and information on environmental health hazards and missing opportunities for prevention. That all changed in 2002, when Congress approved funds for CDC to begin building the country's first comprehensive environmental public health tracking network.

Today, the network is empowering entire communities to take charge of their own health. *Here are their stories.*

CALIFORNIA

Tracking Strengthens Community Partnerships & Protects Community Health



TRACKING NETWORKS empower communities to take control of their health and advocate for policies that prevent disease. Such is the case in Imperial County, California.

Imperial County is home to one of the state's most vital farming regions as well as a high and disproportionate burden of environmental health hazards. One such

hazard is perchlorate, a chemical used in rocket fuel. Perchlorate-contaminated water and soil is an ongoing concern for communities such as Imperial County, which is located downstream from a former perchlorate factory. In high doses, perchlorate can impair thyroid function and lead to developmental problems in children and fetuses.

Initiated by public health workers with the California Environmental Health Tracking Program, a study was designed and carried out to gain a clearer picture of the community's perchlorate exposure.

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water samples as well as locally grown produce.

Results showed that the average estimated perchlorate dose among project participants was 70 percent higher than the national average. All participants were mailed their personal results, invited to a meeting with project staff and other participants to ask questions about and discuss project results, and offered the opportunity to visit with a local physician to talk about the results and undergo follow-up testing free of charge.

"This effort has empowered our community and helped identify gaps in policy," said Luis Olmedo, executive director of Comité Cívico del Valle. "It's work that is driven by the interests of the community. It just feels like it belongs to us...it's just that much more powerful."

Critical to the effort was partnering with the environmental justice organization Comité Cívico del Valle and its community health workers, who are known as promotoras de salud. As trusted figures in the community, the promotoras recruited community participants and gathered urine and

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MASSACHUSETTS

Tracking Boosts Public Health Capacity & Empowers Community Change



TODAY, MASSACHUSETTS residents can learn about the incidence of cancer in their communities with just a few clicks of a mouse—it's a huge leap forward.

Robin Chapell, health director for the town of Walpole just south of Boston, remembers when it literally took years to gather data on suspected cancer clusters and their relationship to local

environmental hazards. Now, thanks to the Massachusetts Environmental Public Health Tracking Network's innovative cancer mapping tool, Chapell can generate information in a matter of minutes.

"Having this information available gives people power, it makes them feel like they have more control over the situation," Chapell said.

The cancer mapping tool, which has attracted hundreds of visitors since its 2009 launch, is unique to Massachusetts and

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was created in response to public concerns. Using data from the state's cancer registry, the mapping tool creates a view of cancer incidence by census tract, community, and county—"you can literally go onto our portal and look up your neighborhood," said Suzanne Condon, associate commissioner and director of the Bureau of Environmental Health at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Visitors can compare their community's cancer incidence with that of communities statewide

and view possible environmental exposures, such as landfills and hazardous waste sites.

"In Massachusetts, we built our system with the public in mind," she said. "It empowers local communities, local public health officials, decision makers, and advocacy groups to take action because they now have this local data available to them."

NEW YORK CITY

Tracking Improves Health & Promotes Prevention



IN EAST HARLEM, childhood asthma prevalence is more than twice as high as in the adjacent Upper East Side neighborhood, and asthma-related hospital stays are four times higher for East Harlem kids than for those living in New York City's highest-income neighborhoods.

For community health worker Teodora Evtimova, network coordinator at the East Harlem Asthma Center for Excellence, addressing such disparities means having the latest data. That's where the New York City Environmental Public Health Tracking Network comes in.

"It's amazing because it's available for everyone to use," Evtimova said. "It's the closest to real-time data that I've seen."

For example, Evtimova and her fellow health workers can use the local Tracking Network to generate neighborhood-

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level maps of childhood asthma-related hospitalizations and of households reporting mice or rats, which are known asthma triggers. These data allow workers on the front lines of asthma control to target interventions where they'll have the greatest impact.

East Harlem isn't the only example of how New York City's Tracking Network is contributing to positive health outcomes. Because tracking data show a rise in childhood asthma-related hospital stays in the fall, city health department staff send messages via the city's Health Alert Network to 30,000 physicians and other health providers, encouraging them to update kids' asthma control plans before school starts.

The asthma data gathered via the city's Tracking Network help the department target its limited resources and prevention efforts where they will have the greatest results.



The Life Cycle of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program

From Congressional funds to better health and prevention in our communities



An Investment in Prevention

CDC's Tracking Network supports an ongoing cycle of collection, assessment, intervention, and evaluation that has the potential to lift the health of entire communities and save significant health care dollars. It is a critical means of finding and connecting diverse pieces of a puzzle—a puzzle that, when fully assembled, can present an entirely different view of a community's health than the individual pieces themselves.

The National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network and its expansion to all states represent a vital investment in disease prevention and acknowledge the significant role our environments play in the health and well-being of America's communities.

To learn more, visit www.cdc.gov/ephtracking.



Protect, Prevent, Live Well

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