

Oregon Environmental Public Health Tracking

Environmental Public Health Capacity Building Plan

Introduction

Environmental Public Health tracking is the on-going collection, integration, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of data on environmental hazards, exposures to those hazards, and related health effects. The goal of tracking is to provide information that can be used to plan, apply, and evaluate actions to prevent and control environmentally related diseases. In many cases, however, data are not available on what substances are getting into people and at what levels.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) - Health Services Department has a planning grant from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to explore environmental public health tracking in Oregon and to plan how data on environmental hazards can be collected and linked to health data information, as well as provide information to decision makers and citizens on the public health impacts of environmental exposures. The CDC planning grant to Oregon was for activities from January of 2004 through September of 2005. It is likely that CDC will extend the grant for 10 months. There will likely then be a national competition between the states for on-going project assistance. The CDC grant work plan prepared by DHS includes a commitment to prepare a capacity building plan. This plan is intended to direct the work of DHS. As an element of the capacity building plan, DHS intends to partner with others interested in environmental public health tracking such as other federal agencies, other state agencies, local governments including local public health departments, not-for-profit organizations, and tribal governments.

Why Build Public Health Department Capacity?

The goal of tracking is to provide information that can be used to plan, apply, and evaluate actions to prevent and control environmentally related diseases.

Building public health department capacity at the local level allows local agencies to better develop and evaluate effective public health actions to prevent or control chronic and acute diseases that can be linked to hazards in the environment. Health care providers can provide better care and targeted preventative services. In addition, the public will have a better understanding of what is occurring in their communities and what actions they may take to protect or improve their health.

Important information about environmental exposure and public health may be able to be captured at the local health department level with minimal additional investment, if necessary training and tools can be provided. Tools and information gathering systems used by one Oregon public health department may be very useful and applicable to other counties faced with similar issues.

Data tracking and linking can be most effective if public health and environmental resources are focused at the local and state level.

Foundation for Plan Development

This Environmental Public Health Capacity Plan is based on three key areas of input:

1. *Local Public Health Department Environmental Health Priorities, Capacity and Needs Survey*, conducted in October of 2003,
2. Suggestions from the EPHT Advisory Committee, and
3. Suggestions from the EPHT Planning Consortium.

Local Public Health Department Environmental Health Priorities, Capacity and Needs Survey

In order to gather input from local Oregon county health departments, OHS conducted a survey of the priorities, capacity and needs of Oregon county health departments in October of 2003. The survey was conducted in collaboration with the Council of Local Health Officers (CHLO). Thirty (30) out of the 35¹ Oregon local health departments responded.

The key environmental public health priorities identified in the survey included:

- Health Concerns including:
 - Asthma – 80%
 - Pesticide poisoning – 57%
 - Work-related illnesses or injuries - 47%
 - Suspected cancer clusters – 43%
- Environmental hazards including:
 - Lead exposure or poisoning – 73%
 - Indoor air issues, including mold – 70%
 - Water pollution – 67%.

The survey results identified specific needs for environmental public health tracking, including:

1. General protocols and electronic systems for logging environmental public health issues and complaints,
2. Education and outreach materials²,
3. Training in environmental public health,
4. Training requested including risk communication, data collection and analysis, investigation, evaluation, needs assessment, community education, and
5. Training preference at regional conferences or courses, on-site classes or workshops and computer or Internet classes.

¹ Two Oregon counties operate a single joint health department, Wasco-Sherman

² To be addressed in the EPHT Education and Outreach plan, currently under development

EPHT Advisory Committee

The EPHT program uses an advisory committee that advises the Department of Human Services on the EPHT program and goals. The Advisory Committee is a group of 12 broadly-based stakeholders. The committee meets quarterly and is co-chaired by DHS and DEQ senior management.

The Advisory Committee considered environmental public health tracking capacity building, and suggested that these elements be included in the capacity building plan:

1. Build a database on risk assessment – this might include an example public complaint tracking system,
2. More mini-grants,
3. Consider the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others in building public health capacity at the local and community level,
4. Partner with housing inspectors at the local level to gather additional information about potential environmental hazards when collecting housing quality information and conducting housing inspections,
5. Collect “insider” environmental data (question here),
6. Tie collecting environmental public health information to providing public health services at the local level,
7. Involve the agriculture community on informing public about environmental public health issues,
8. Look at the information needs at the local level, and
9. Focus on building environmental public health data tracking capacity in schools and Head Start programs.

EPHT Planning Consortium

The EPHT Planning Consortium is a broad based group open to all with an interest in EPHT. The Planning Consortium meets quarterly in Portland and around the state and advises EPHT on program and goals. Information on the Planning Consortium and its discussions is posted on the EPHT web site. Information is shared over the web site to those interested.

The Planning Consortium discussed capacity building at its meeting on November 1, 2004, and provided these ideas for areas where local public health departments could use assistance in building their capacity:

1. Increase in environmental public health expertise,
2. Increase funding for local public health departments,
3. Risk communication skills and training,
4. Improved skills and tools for integrating environmental public health into routine surveillance programs,
5. Increased education and awareness¹,
6. Develop a single inventory of all relevant projects in the state with contact information,

¹ To be addressed in the EPHT Education and Outreach plan, currently under development
D R A F T Environmental Public Health Capacity Plan
Oregon Environmental Public Health Tracking
 10/13/2006
 Page 3

7. Develop a repository of information on experts at state and local levels,
8. Expand mini-grants to allow for non-profit organizations as well as counties to apply,
9. Develop a checklist for capacity building at local health department level,
10. Focus on the EPHT information needs,
11. Start additional health exposure registries for Oregon,
12. Develop standard templates for data sharing, and
13. Establish community partnerships for “train-the-trainer” type programs

Action Plan

This plan will direct work of the Oregon Human Services, EPHT staff from February 2005 through October 2005. The plan will be amended and updated to cover the grant period October 2005 through July, 2006. Oregon Human Services intends to apply to CDC for additional funding for EPHT implementation.

The capacity building plan has three elements:

1. Training
2. Facilitate Information Sharing
3. Mini-grants

Training

Two specific training programs are planned:

- **Risk Communication** - Oregon Human Services will hold a risk communication training program for local health departments. The training will be a full day or one-half day workshop. The training will be scheduled in coordination with the OR-EPI annual DHS and local health department’s meeting, usually held in the spring. The risk communication training program will be provided by EPHT.
- **Existing Environmental Database Inventory training** – Oregon Human services will partner with Oregon DEQ to inventory and present a training program on existing environmental databases and how to access and use these databases. This training will be coordinated with CLHO in order to provide the training at a date, time, and location convenient for local health departments.

Facilitate Information Sharing

The EPHT program will facilitate information sharing through the Advisory Committee and Planning Consortium. EPHT staff will continue to communicate with interested parties about opportunities to join the Planning Consortium through newsletters, events, posters, and presentations.

As time allows, the Planning Consortium meetings will include educational and outreach topics that build local health department capacity.

EPHT staff will consider building a ‘list serve’ in order to periodically e-mail EPHT related information of interest to those tracking environmental public health issues in

Oregon. This ‘list serve’ might be used to provide concise, condensed EPHT information to those interested, on a monthly or quarterly basis. This idea will be vetted with the Advisory Committee and Planning Consortium, and will only be pursued if there is substantial interest.

Mini-grants

Six Oregon counties are participating in the first round of mini-grants; these data linkage pilot projects are scheduled to be completed July of 2005.

EPHT will continue to facilitate information sharing between mini-grant communities by hosting information-sharing meetings, facilitating telephone conference calls, and providing other technical assistance to the mini-grant communities.

At the conclusion of the first round of mini-grants, EPHT plans to work with the mini-grant counties to share general protocols and electronic tracking systems developed with other Oregon local health departments. This information may be posted on the web site or may be duplicated on a CD-ROM and distributed to the counties.

Several mini-grant projects are of keen interest to others interested in the EPHT program including learning how programs worked with local schools to track public health issues, and learning how programs worked with housing inspectors to track public health issues.

The county mini-grant experiences will be discussed in detail at a Planning Consortium meeting; these presentations will include a sharing of tools and “lessons learned” from each project.

Information from the mini-grant projects will be posted to the EPHT web site and appropriate “tools”, like electronic tracking templates, will also be posted.

EPHT will consider an additional round of mini-grants in the fall of 2005. Issues to be evaluated in determining if an additional round of mini-grants is appropriate will include: types of projects most successful, the *Request for Grant Applications* process, and recruiting non-government organization participation in the mini-grants.

The EPHT program will also consider if tribal governments might be interested in EPHT mini-grants, and if so, how best to pursue this issue.

Evaluation

A separate contract has been developed to evaluate the capacity building plan. This contractor will be evaluating the capacity building program at the conclusion of the grant period. Adjustments will be made to the capacity building plan based on the evaluation results.