

PROTECTING OREGON COMMUNITIES FROM ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RISKS

Public health: critical role in keeping communities safe and healthy

Preventing environmental health risks can reduce the rates of illness and decrease the overall costs of healthcare in Oregon. In light of recent events across the state—lead in school drinking water, radon exposure in schools, metals emissions from manufacturers and air quality concerns—investing in environmental public health is a critical protection for all communities in Oregon.

Air quality and human health assessments

The environmental public health program in Oregon can currently conduct about five health assessments a year. However, to address environmental health risks, such as recent air quality concerns, the need is approximately five times that.

Gaps in protection

According to a [2016 assessment](#) of public health in Oregon, public health programs that identify and prevent environmental health risks are limited or minimal in two-thirds of Oregon's communities.



Funding a modernized public health system will increase environmental public health protections for all people in Oregon, especially those at high risk. Environmental health issues such as childhood lead poisoning, poor air quality and the health effects of climate change disproportionately affect low-income and minority populations.

Currently, environmental public health work is funded primarily through federal grant dollars which have strict requirements on how the dollars can be spent and offer little flexibility to perform work that is outside the scope of the grant. When situations arise such as the recent metals emissions from glass manufacturers, this rigid funding system makes it challenging for public health to assist. Oregon's public health system needs dedicated state funding to adequately address existing and emerging environmental health concerns.

Solution

With additional funding, the public health system will prioritize the most significant environmental health risks as defined by Governor Brown's strategic initiative for the environment and health. Oregon's public health system will work with Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Education, and other partners to:



- Improve air quality in Oregon, with special focus on high risk communities
- Integrate human health assessments and protections into decision making processes
- Build community resilience to respond to emerging environmental risks

By closing the gaps in the public health system, we can ensure that a healthy life is within reach for everyone in Oregon.

Learn more at healthoregon.org/modernization or publichealth.policy@state.or.us.