The emergence of many new issues and threats… Cryptosporidium in drinking water, hantavirus, Escherichia coli, West Nile virus, and most recently homeland terrorism… points to the need for a well prepared environmental public health system.” 
Source: CDC 2003
CHALLENGES

Fragmented System

Five agencies are responsible for environmental public health services in Alabama. These agencies are often insular and focus on their mandates. There is a lack of coordination of environmental public health services across agencies, resulting in wasteful administrative costs, a duplication of efforts and in some cases omission of services.

Ill-Prepared Work Force

The environmental public health work force is not adequately prepared or trained in environmental public health practices or how to work within communities.

Stretched Resources

There are not enough environmental public health professionals employed in Alabama. In a recent study, it was reported that an eight-county health department needed 38 percent more staff to meet mandated responsibilities (e.g., number of inspections).

+ There is difficulty attracting and retaining young professionals to environmental public health service because of low pay compared to the private sector.

Support Environmental Public Health Services

Environmental public health practitioners are responsible for protecting and preventing public exposure to harmful agents. Protection of the public’s health comes through the many services they provide, including monitoring air quality, safe drinking water and food safety, integrated pest management (e.g., West Nile virus), toxic chemical control, disaster planning and control (terrorism) and public education. State and local environmental public health programs are typically under-funded and stretched beyond capacity. Environmental public health practitioners are often not sufficiently trained or supported to handle the emerging and complex environmental public health issues they face every day. Programs lack infrastructure to manage these issues, and research is needed. There is a need to continue and increase the federal funding that is so critical to these programs. Without this support, the environmental public health systems may not be able to fulfill their responsibilities, resulting in an increased risk to the public’s health. CDC, NCEH, Environmental Health Services Branch is spearheading an effort to revitalize environmental public health services. For more information on this program, visit www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs, or call APHA’s Director of Government Relations and Affiliate Affairs at (202) 777-2541.

CDC FUNDED PROGRAMS

Developing Communities of Excellence in the Deep South.

University of Alabama School of Public Health (UAB SPH) Department of Environmental Health Sciences was awarded a grant from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Environmental Health (CDC, NCEH) to establish a Deep South Center of Excellence. The Center established training programs and conducted community-based research on environmental interventions in rural settings.

Southeast Regional Environmental Public Health Academic Center.

UAB SPH Department of Environmental Health Science has received funding from CDC, NCEH for a Southeast Regional Environmental Public Health Academic Center that will partner with state and territorial health departments in 10 Southeastern states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

PACE EH. Eleven communities in Alabama, including West Anniston, conducted PACE EH (Protocol for Assessing Communities of Excellence in Environmental Health). PACE EH is a program of the National Association of City and County Health Officials (with funding from CDC) and a model that involves the community in environmental public health assessment and planning. PACE EH resulted in a broader level of community involvement in environmental public health activities such as West Nile virus bird testing, lead poisoning prevention and safe drinking water.

PUBLIC HEALTH ENVIRONMENTALIST: THE FACTS

| number employed: 223* | number needed: an additional 75 |
| entry-level salary: $26,410 |

TYPICAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Safe waterways
- Private wells
- Pool inspections
- Tattoo/tanning inspections
- Vector control
- Emergency preparedness and response

* excluding Mobile and Jefferson County
** In some cases, the environmental public health worker may be independently responsible for environmental public health services within an entire county.