Pennsylvania

CRITICAL ISSUES

TOXIC WASTE
In 1999, Pennsylvania ranked in the top 90 percent of dirtiest states for cancer and non-cancer risk and as the third-highest in number of Superfund sites.


POOR WATER QUALITY
Each year an estimated 16 billion gallons of raw sewage containing dangerous bacteria and viruses are discharged from outflows into Pittsburgh waterways where people boat, swim and wade, and into drinking water sources. The sewage collection system for this area is inadequate and cannot contain overflow from homes.


MANAGING URBAN SPRAWL
Philadelphia ranks fifth in the nation of the 100 largest urban areas and sixth in sprawl. Sprawl contributes to environmental public health issues by increasing the population and thus the demand for services, and by increasing air and water pollution.


GREATEST CHALLENGES

FRAGMENTED SYSTEM
Environmental public health services across the state are inconsistent and fragmented.

ILL-PREPARED WORKFORCE
Environmental public health professionals are nearing retirement and there is a shortage of young professionals in the ranks.

STRETCHED RESOURCES
Pennsylvania has the fewest number of public health workers per capita in the nation. Combined with retiring professionals and loss of positions due to budget cuts, the number of environmental public health professionals is insufficient.

MODEL PROGRAMS

FORMING LINKAGES
In Philadelphia, the Department of Health has linked its maternal and child health services with its environmental public health programs to provide comprehensive in-home service to newborns. A maternal and child public health professional works with the environmental public health professional to assess and manage rodent infestation in unhealthy homes.

INCREASING EFFICIENCY
The Philadelphia Department of Health passed an ordinance that requires food establishments to have a staff person trained in food safety onsite during all hours of operation. The health department can now provide a food safety assurance function rather than a regulatory oversight function.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

When Yvonne Van Haitsma discovered through a routine pediatric check-up that her 1-year-old daughter, Maya, had elevated lead levels, the local environmental public health service was proactive in helping figure out the possible source and how to reduce the lead hazard.

Through a home inspection and an interview, it was discovered that Maya might have ingested lead-based paint chips that had fallen to the ground from recent home renovations.

Thankfully, with the help and guidance of the local environmental public health services, Maya and the Van Haitsmas’ home are now risk-free.

“The local environmental public health department was proactive... when my 1-year-old daughter had high lead levels.”

Source: CDC 2003

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.”
CHALLENGES

Fragmented System

- Environmental public health services in Pennsylvania are fragmented and dispersed. Of the state’s 67 counties, 10 have local public health agencies that provide environmental public health services. The remaining 57 counties rely on seven state agencies and private organizations for services, which are often minimal, especially in rural areas.

- At the state level, those seven state agencies are responsible for different environmental public health issues. It can be difficult to coordinate responses, especially when dealing with an emergency response or a new and emerging issue, such as when West Nile virus first appeared.


III-Prepared Work Force

The average age of an environmental public health worker in Pennsylvania is higher than the national average. There is a shortage of young professionals to fill the positions of retiring professionals.

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<tr>
<th>U.S. Worker</th>
<th>U.S. Public Health Worker</th>
<th>Pennsylvania Public Health Worker</th>
<th>Allegheny County Environmental Public Health Worker</th>
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<td>average age (years) 40 46.7 47 53*</td>
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*Allegheny County Health Department lost 10 percent of its staff due to budget cuts in 2004.

Source: ASTHO 2004; Allegheny County Health Department 2004

Stretched Resources

- The number of public health professionals per capita is the lowest among all states. This number continues to decline as baby boomers retire.

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<th>AVERAGE NUMBER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS PER CAPITA</th>
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<td>National 138/100,000</td>
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<td>Pennsylvania 37/100,000</td>
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- Given this insufficient number, there is concern as to how the individual environmental public health worker can keep up with daily responsibilities as well as adequately prepare for and handle emerging and emergency issues.

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.

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