

Establishing a Tribal Environmental Health Collaborative in San Diego County

Paula Stigler
The San Diego Foundation

Introduction

Tribal communities in San Diego are mostly dependent on the federal Indian Health Service for their public health and environmental health needs. There are more than eighteen tribes and only one federal environmental health officer with limited jurisdiction on these tribal lands.

The Tribal Environmental Health Collaborative was assembled to enable the participating tribes to assess key EH priority areas. PACE EHs were formed among multiple tribal environmental departments, tribal non-profit organizations, universities and federal agencies to accomplish the goals.

The Tribal Environmental Health Collaborative serves as a model group working towards the following goals:

- Completion of a comprehensive analysis of local tribal statistics and human and environmental health concerns;
- Strengthening and expanding a network of organizations working with tribal populations to more effectively monitor and abate environmental hazards to human health;
- Increased the knowledge and capacity of tribal communities and tribal environmental programs to address critical environmental health risks and concerns; and
- Building a strong coalition of organizations working to advance solutions to interrelated health and environmental concerns on tribal lands.

Setting

San Diego County is home to the highest number of Native American reservations per county in the nation with 18 federally recognized reservations and an estimated population of about 6,800 tribal members living on reservation land.

Tribal Lands in the San Diego Region



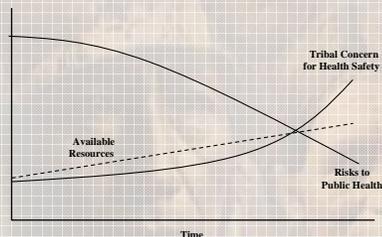
Many reservations are completely lacking or have insufficient access to basic services such as clean water, proper solid waste removal and adequate sewage treatment. Many tribal communities are also disproportionately impacted by health problems such as asthma, digestive and circulatory problems and metabolic disorders that could be directly related to exposure to environmental pollutants. Moreover, more toxic waste and dump sites are located on or near tribal reservations than any other community in the county, with several more being proposed for the near future. Most reservations rely upon groundwater as their main source of drinking water and are not connected to the regions plumbing system. It is critical that there are proper monitoring systems in place within these communities which assist in tracking and abatement of the primary sources of pollution that pose the greatest public health risks.



Problem Statement

Tribal environmental departments (EPAs) are charged with educating community members as well as developing policies and regulations for the tribal government with regards to protection of the environment. However, tribal EPAs are not receiving adequate information and resources to address environmental health problems within their communities. The Indian Health Services (IHS) does not have sufficient resources to deal with all of the risks of so many constituent tribes. There is also an apparent gap in communication and, hence, lack of trust between many tribes and the IHS.

Key Variables Graph

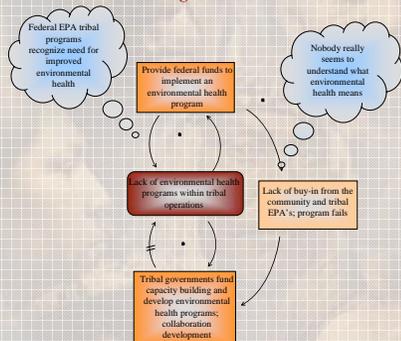


It is expected that as tribal EPA's become more aware of potential and real environmental health issues facing their communities that more resources will become available to decrease those risks posed to public health. Resources may come from new found sources dealing with environmental health (e.g. tribal funds, community foundations, federal sources not normally utilized by tribal communities) or pressure from tribes to advocate for more funds from federal sources to address the issues.



Causal Loop Diagrams and Applicable Archetypes

"Shifting the Burden"



Project Plan

Outcome Objective

- By January 2009 environmental health priorities will be identified in at least 8 tribal communities in the San Diego region and environmental health projects will be implemented.

Determinant

- Gap in resources and information regarding environmental health has caused tribal EPA's to not focus on environmental health priorities within their communities.

Impact Objective

- By 2009 have applied for funding through federal CARE program for project implementation as well as leverage funding from tribal governments and other sources.

Contributing Factors

- Lack of personnel and funding resources as Indian Health Service is significantly under funded, and tribes are not getting all of the services and the medical care that they need; tribal EPA's do not have the capacity and/or resources to implement environmental health programs.
- Learning curve for tribal governments and EPA's on topics related to environmental health.
- Little to no communication between tribal governments, environmental offices, Indian Health Clinics and IHS environmental health officers due to strained relationships and/or lack of time and resources.
- Overburdened staff has not allowed for formal follow-up policies or investigations to be developed and implemented concerning environmental health problems.

Process Objectives

- By July 2008, complete community environmental health surveys
- By December 2008, evaluate and prioritize top environmental health issues in the San Diego regions tribal communities.
- By January 2009, develop a strategic action plan to address priorities.
- By 2010, receive support for project implementation.
- By 2011, re-evaluation of communities through surveys.



Methodology

Tribal Environmental Health Collaborative

- Have 6-10 tribal representatives and outside partners of their choice
- Tribes were contacted and invited to join the Tribal Environmental Health Collaborative.
- Chuck Treser gave a presentation on the basics of environmental health and the collaborative agreed to meet and discuss partnerships.

Action Plan

- Meetings were held with potential partners to find out what services could be provided to them through partnering.
- PACE EH was discussed and models were used to develop implementation tool
- Prepare surveys for dissemination in the communities

Project Implementation

- Present findings to tribal forums and governments, federal government, IHS and other partners
- Locate sufficient funds to address problems and implement projects

National Goals Supported

CDC Health Protection Goals

- #44: **Promote homes that are healthy, safe, and accessible.**
 - By enhancing communication between tribal EPA's and community members a system can be developed where homes are surveyed by trained individuals who can identify environmental health risks.
- #45: **Promote adoption of behaviors that keep people healthy and safe in their homes.**
 - Through outreach and education about the dangers of environmental health contaminants tribal EPA's can assist community members in improving the health of their home.

National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services

- **Activity VI-A1-1:** "Identify stakeholders who influence all components of the environment that have an impact on environmental public health services."
- **Activity VI-A1-2:** "Support activities that influence stakeholders to work together to improve environmental public health."
- **Activity VI-A1-3:** "Develop mechanisms for regular communication and coordination among stakeholders"



10 Essential Environmental Health Services

Assessment

- Monitor health by analyzing data provided by IHS and local health clinics; surveying community members through tribal EPA's.
- Diagnose and investigate environmental health problems and health hazards in the community by providing tribal EPA directors with an opportunity to discuss and learn about local environmental health issues in their communities.

Policy Development

- Inform, Educate, Empower tribal governments and EPA's by providing them with facilitated meetings to educate them on environmental health issues through utilization of PACE EH, supporting materials, guest lecturers, and other resources.
- Mobilize Community Partnerships to identify and solve environmental health problems.
- Develop Policies to provide additional resources for tribal EPA's to be able to investigate environmental health concerns in order to best ensure adequate tribal policies to protect public health.

Assurance

- Enforce Laws through tribal ordinances developed around EH protections.
- Link to Provide Care for community members through IHS, universities, non-profits or other entities that are culturally competent.
- Assure Competent Workforce within the tribal EPA's and organizations working with the tribal communities.
- Evaluate the success of the program by implementing surveys regularly within communities.

Next Steps

- Ensure the tribal environmental health collaborative is sustainable and has sufficient funding to continue
- Continue building the collaborative by conducting regularly scheduled monthly meetings and continuing to invite key players to participate.
- Develop a tribal PACE EH tool that is easy for tribal EPA's to implement as needed.
- Re-evaluation of environmental health knowledge among tribal community members and tribal EPA's.

Literature Cited

- Oski, C. eds. *10 Essential Services of Environmental Health*. Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, University of Washington, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, Seattle; 2004.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Health Protection Goals*. Atlanta, GA: Department of Health and Human Services; Oct 2005.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *A National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services*. Atlanta, GA: Department of Health and Human Services; Oct 2003.

Acknowledgments

Chuck Treser

Mentor, University of Washington

Emily Young, PhD

Environment Program Director, The San Diego Foundation

Lenore Valtura, BS

Tribal Environment Program Director, Pala Band of Mission Indians

Keith Pezzoli, PhD

Professor of Urban Planning, University of California San Diego

David Fellow, PhD

Professor Ethnic Studies, University of California San Diego

Hiram Sarabia, MS

Research Associate SBRRP, University of California San Diego

For Further Information

Paula Stigler
Environment Program Manager and Tribal Liaison
The San Diego Foundation
2508 Historic Decatur Road, Suite 200
San Diego, CA 92106
(619) 814-1366 • paula@sdfoundation.org
www.sdfoundation.org

