

CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

CDC 24/7: Saving Lives. Protecting People from Health Threats. Saving Money Through Prevention.

Environmental Health

Your environment is everything around you—the air you breathe, the water you drink, the community you live in, the places where your food is grown or prepared, your workplace, and your home. When your environment is safe and healthy, you are more likely to stay healthy. But when your environment exposes you to dangerous events or toxic substances, your health can be negatively affected.

CDC is committed to saving lives and protecting people from environmental hazards by responding to natural and man-made disasters, supporting state and city public health programs, educating communities, and providing scientific knowledge. We help maintain and improve the health of Americans by promoting a healthy environment and preventing premature death and avoidable illness caused by environmental and related factors. CDC also identifies how people might be exposed to hazardous substances in the environment and assesses exposures to determine if they are hazardous to human health. CDC invests in prevention to improve health and save money by reducing health care costs. We strive to maximize the impact of every dollar entrusted to the agency.



The World Health Organization reports that nearly 25% of all diseases are caused by environmental exposures. The public is very interested in the role of the environment in disease development. Trust for America's Health polled voters and found that 92% of them believe that environmental factors are an important cause of disease.

For every \$1 invested in a nationwide health tracking network, the federal government saves \$1.44 in health care costs (Public Health Foundation. *Return on Investment of Nationwide Health Tracking*. 2001.)

Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

The Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network) is a dynamic Web-based tool that tracks and reports environmental hazards and the health problems that may be related to them. The Tracking Network was the first surveillance system to provide environmental data and public health data together in one place.

The Tracking Network integrates health, environmental exposure, and hazard information from numerous national, state and city sources. It helps

- scientists better assess the connections between the environment and its effect on health.
- health professionals and researchers access more and better scientific data to learn about health conditions related to the environment.
- public health officials make decisions quickly and better target prevention efforts by using tracking data.
- parents learn about conditions, such as asthma or the presence of contaminants where they live, so they can take action to protect their children.
- elected officials make more informed health policy decisions. For example, they can see their community's air-quality trends to determine if actions taken to reduce pollution levels are working.

CDC funds participation of 23 states and New York City in the Tracking Network. These sites build their own local tracking systems and contribute data to the Tracking Network. These local tracking networks serve more than 168 million people, or 55%, of the U.S. population. The Tracking Program has also mentored and trained 17 other states, counties and cities that serve almost 81 million people.

The Tracking Network includes health and environmental topics, as well as other information.

Health topics are:

- Asthma
- Birth defects
- Cancer
- Carbon monoxide poisoning
- Childhood lead poisoning
- Developmental disabilities
- Heart attacks
- Reproductive and birth outcomes

National Center for Environmental Health
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry



Environmental topics are:

- Climate change
- Community water
- Community design
- Homes
- Outdoor air quality

Other information:

- Population characteristics
- Biomonitoring
- Children's environmental health

Program Funding: Environmental Public Health Tracking Network	
Year	Funding Level
FY 2010	\$33,168,000
FY 2011*	\$35,000,000
FY 2012*	\$35,000,000

*Affordable Care Act (Prevention and Public Health Fund)

Public Health in Action: Tracking Health Effects and Trends around the Country

Environmental public health tracking has led to more than 130 public health interventions that have protected people from health effects of environmental exposures.

This prevention investment benefits our nation's health with:

- **Opportunities for public health officials to be proactive**
 - » People living in Franklin County, Massachusetts, expressed concern about the number of new cases of cancer appearing in their towns due to the close proximity of a nuclear power plant. The Tracking Program examined data for five cancer types with possible associations to radiation and did not find any unusual patterns for these cancers in Franklin County. These findings were shared with the community. Because data are readily available on the Tracking Network, answering inquiries like this one takes less time and fewer resources and, most importantly, helps ease the concerns of the community.
 - » Utah's Tracking Program worked with partners to determine that many private wells in Millard County had high levels of arsenic. As a result, the health department recommended not using well water in this area for drinking or cooking and advised residents to install water systems to reduce arsenic exposure.
- **Readily available information to inform policy changes that protect people from environmental contaminants**
 - » Every year in the United States, an estimated 15,200 people seek medical care in an emergency department or miss at least one day of work due to carbon monoxide (CO) exposure. Data from Maine's Tracking Program informed a bill requiring CO detectors in all new homes, rental properties and existing homes at the time of transfer.
 - » Oregon's Tracking Program showed that workers at locations that allowed indoor smoking were exposed to pollution levels more than three times higher than the annual EPA exposure standard. The program provided data to inform legislation prohibiting smoking in most work sites and public places.
- **Better decision-making tools for health at other agencies**
 - » California's Tracking Program developed a tool that both the San Francisco Planning Department and the Bay Area Quality Management District use to guide city planning decisions to promote better public health.
 - » New York City's Tracking Program worked with area hospitals and the health department's Birth Defects Registry to improve reporting for all five boroughs. Improved reporting helps public health professionals better understand relationships between birth defects and the environment.

For More Information

National Center for Environmental Health
www.cdc.gov/nceh

Environmental Public Health
Tracking Program
www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking

