

► DIRECT FROM CDC ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING NETWORK



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CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network Classroom Modules

Editor's Note: As part of our continuing effort to highlight innovative approaches and tools to improve the health and environment of communities, the *Journal* is pleased to publish a bimonthly column from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network). The Tracking Network is a system of integrated health, exposure, and hazard information and data from a variety of national, state, and city sources. The Tracking Network brings together data concerning health and environmental problems with the goal of providing information to help improve where we live, work, and play.

Environmental causes of chronic diseases are hard to identify. Measuring amounts of hazardous substances in our environment in a standard way, tracing the spread of these over time and area, seeing how they show up in human tissues, and understanding how they may cause illness is critical. The Tracking Network is a tool that can help connect these efforts. Through these columns, readers will learn about the program and the resources, tools, and information available from CDC's Tracking Network.

The conclusions of this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of CDC.

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CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Program (Tracking Program) recently released the *Keeping Track, Promoting Health* classroom modules. These free learning modules provide college-level information on environmental public health using the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network). The modules include adaptable, interactive resources that emphasize the wide-reaching implications of environmental health as well as the practical application of

the Tracking Network. The information addresses three key learning objectives:

- to increase knowledge of the fundamental aspects of environmental public health,
- to increase knowledge of the Tracking Network, and
- to develop skills for using the Tracking Network to identify and solve public health problems.

The modules are available at <http://ephtracking.cdc.gov/training.action>.

Background

Education lays the foundation for practice throughout a career. What we first learn becomes our default; the tools we discover become our "go-to" resources. Very limited environmental health teaching resources exist for undergraduate and graduate-level students, particularly easy-to-understand materials for classroom instruction. The *Keeping Track, Promoting Health* classroom modules were developed in an effort to fill this gap.

Academic educators face tremendous and diverse pressures: student requests, course planning, research projects, grant writing, university leadership roles, and many more. What we think of as the primary role of an academic instructor has become just one piece of a demanding puzzle. With this in mind, the Tracking Program followed two basic principles in developing the classroom modules: make them easy to use and make them versatile. The modules are intended to educate future public health and environmental health professionals on the basics of environmental public health, and application of those principles within the Tracking Network, through real-life case-based scenarios.

Development

Since the classroom modules were developed for professors and students, it was important to engage them from the inception. Before beginning development of the modules, the program conducted a round of key informant interviews with five professors. These interviews allowed the program to gather formative information about the needs of this audience that helped guide development of the materials. Based on this formative evaluation, the program developed presentations with speaker

FIGURE 1

Module 1—Introduction to Environmental Public Health

Introduction to Environmental Public Health

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FIGURE 2

Module 2—Introduction to Environmental Public Health Tracking

Introduction to Environmental Public Health Tracking

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notes written in plain language and other supporting materials to fit classroom needs.

Key Components

Two modules are included in this suite of resources:

- Module I—Introduction to Environmental Public Health (Figure 1) and
 - Module II—Introduction to Environmental Public Health Tracking (Figure 2).
- Both modules are available as PowerPoint slide decks, including speaker notes. The modules also include the following:
- in-class activities,
 - homework assignments,
 - sample exam questions,
 - an activity and assignment guide, and
 - an adaptation guide.

Module I includes 35 PowerPoint slides that cover general environmental public health topics, such as the role of environmental health in public health, monitoring environmental public health, and career opportunities. Module II includes 59 slides that provide an overview of the Tracking Network, how to use the Tracking Network, and success stories from state and local health departments. Both modules include audiovisual pieces, such as videos and podcasts, to help make the materials more engaging for students.

The adaptation guide that comes with the materials highlights the adaptability and flex-

ibility of the modules. It includes tips for preparing to use the materials and provides four examples of how the lessons and supporting materials can be adapted to fit different class structures, including one three-hour class, three 50-minute classes, one 50-minute class, and two 50-minute classes.

Other Training Materials Available

In addition to the *Keeping Track, Promoting Health* classroom modules, a number of other Tracking Network training resources are available for different levels of education and experience. CDC has partnered for many years with the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) to provide two tracking-related trainings accessible through the Tracking Network Web site and NEHA's online training Web site:

- Environmental Public Health Tracking 101 (Tracking 101)
Tracking 101 gives an overview of the major components of environmental public health tracking. Topics include the National Tracking Network and Program, surveillance and epidemiology, types of tracking data, GIS, policies, and communication. Users can earn free continuing education credits from CDC and NEHA.
- Tracking in Action: Workforce Implementation
Tracking in Action provides real-life examples of grantee Tracking Programs and Networks and how they have partnered with

local programs and organizations to identify and address environmental health concerns.

CDC also has written a "how-to" guide for states or cities that are not funded by the national program but may be interested in starting environmental public health tracking activities. It is available on the Tracking Network Web site.

The Tracking Network is the nation's most comprehensive environmental public health surveillance system. If you have not had an opportunity to explore it, please visit today at <http://www.cdc.gov/ephtracking>.

If you are interested in the *Keeping Track, Promoting Health* classroom modules, or any other training resource available, visit the Tracking Network Training Web page at <http://ephtracking.cdc.gov/training.action> to request copies of this free resource.

The best way to stay connected with the Tracking Program is by joining our LISTSERV. Send an e-mail to eph@cdc.gov and you will receive updates about new data, tools, and other resources as they become available. 

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