

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- About 40,000 hazardous waste sites have been reported to the federal government. Additionally, thousands of unplanned releases of toxins into the environment occur each year.
- More than 1,600 hazardous waste sites are included on the National Priorities List (NPL) and are targeted for clean up by the Environmental Protection Agency. About 15 million people live within 1 mile of NPL sites.
- A broad range of adverse health effects—from birth defects to chronic diseases such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, or lupus—are increasingly being linked to exposure to environmental contamination.

WHAT HAS ATSDR ACCOMPLISHED?

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) performs environmental health surveillance via the National Exposure Registry and the Hazardous Substances and Emergency Events Surveillance (HSEES) system. ATSDR initiated HSEES in 1990. ATSDR maintains the active, state-based HSEES system to describe the public health consequences associated with the release of hazardous substances. In 2003, 15 states participated in HSEES.

In 2002, ATSDR published a report summarizing the findings of the surveillance for the 2-year period from 1999 through 2000. This report included information on 13,808 hazardous substance events and 4,425 injured persons (74 of whom died).

Participating states used the 1999–2000 data analysis to identify and implement prevention outreach activities that were geared to preventing spills, releases, and resulting injuries. Prevention activities have included developing fact sheets, reports, posters, presentations, websites, news articles, and journal articles. These activities were focused on counties and industries (e.g., chlorine users, transportation, agricultural industries) with the most frequent spills, and the most frequently spilled chemicals (i.e., ammonia, chlorine, mercury, pesticides, and illicit methamphetamine chemicals). Other prevention activities have targeted population groups that are frequently injured, such as employees, first responders, and students.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Developing the HSEES system's capabilities to enable users' access via the Internet is a primary focus. ATSDR is working with the Pew Environmental Health Commission and other public health professionals to offer solutions to surveillance challenges cited in Pew's 2000 report, *America's Environmental Health Gap*.