

## Direct from CDC's Environmental Health Services Branch

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# Developing Environmental Public Health Leadership

*Editor's note: NEHA strives to provide up-to-date and relevant information on environmental health and to build partnerships in the profession. In pursuit of these goals, we will feature a column from the Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in every issue of the Journal.*

*EHSB's objective is to strengthen the role of state, local, and national environmental health programs and professionals to anticipate, identify, and respond to adverse environmental exposures and the consequences of these exposures for human health. The services being developed through EHSB include access to topical, relevant, and scientific information; consultation; and assistance to environmental health specialists, sanitarians, and environmental health professionals and practitioners.*

*EHSB appreciates NEHA's invitation to provide monthly columns for the Journal. In the coming months, EHSB staff will be highlighting a variety of concerns, opportunities, challenges, and successes that we all share in environmental public health. This month's column provides an overview of the Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute.*

**W**hat challenges await leaders of environmental public health? Are leaders prepared to face these challenges? The National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continuously works with its many public health partners to envision and prepare for future environmental public health needs. Recent discussions with environmental and public health practitioners, interest groups, members of academia, and nongovernmental organizations have provided insights on the condition of public and environmental health in the United States. The assessment found an environmental public health workforce challenged by emerging and difficult problems. It also identified the preparation of environmental public health leaders as a critical unmet need.

Building the leadership capacity of the environmental public health workforce is a primary objective of the NCEH *National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services*. One way in which NCEH is achieving this goal is through the Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute (EPHLI). EPHLI is modeled after a leadership training program for environmental public health professionals piloted in 2004–2005. The program was developed by CDC's Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB) working with NEHA, the Louisville Metro Health Department, and the National Public Health Leadership Development Network.

Effective environmental public health leadership ensures that the environmental public

health delivery system can respond to emerging threats, and it coordinates the delivery of needed services in areas affected by any form of disaster. Clear and decisive leadership is especially important in times of crisis and chaos. The environmental public health services system must have leaders who can provide critical guidance during emergencies.

The history of public health in the United States abounds with success stories. Leaders have confronted and resolved serious issues by accepting responsibility, establishing direction, motivating and inspiring people, and implementing needed action. Today, as in the past, environmental public health is competing with other priority programs and services for limited resources. Environmental public health leaders continue to face the challenges of public indifference, lack of resources, increasing demand for services, an ill-prepared workforce, and a fragmented environmental public health service delivery system struggling to meet new and emerging threats. The leaders of today and tomorrow will need to confront and resolve such challenges, and EPHLI will enhance the leadership skills needed for this task. It provides a forum for the discussion and resolution of contemporary environmental public health issues facing the nation.

The second EPHLI cycle began in February 2006. Forty EPHLI fellows are participating in the second cycle. The program consists of four meeting sessions, several intersession conference calls, and a fellow-selected project addressing a current work site issue. Projects are an important aspect of this leadership development program; they allow fellows to practice and demonstrate new and improved

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leadership skills. Fellows are expected to choose a challenging project of organizational, local, state, regional, or national significance. A mentor is assigned to work with each fellow to develop a project of value to the fellow, the fellow's employer, and the practice of environmental public health. Fellows learn how to build effective teams and partnerships; persuade, influence, and generate support for action; resolve conflict; and use problem-solving, decision-making, and system-thinking processes. EPHLI also gives environmental public health leaders the opportunity to interact and create a lasting network of leaders who will influence the future direction of environmental public health. Detailed information on the program and application process is posted at [www.gov/nceh/ehs/](http://www.gov/nceh/ehs/).

CDC and its partners expect EPHLI to produce several beneficial outcomes. In the short term, the program will enhance the leadership capabilities of environmental public health service providers. In the long term, these leaders will influence and improve the practice of environmental public health. These improvements will reduce exposure to environmental public health risks and lead to a reduction in environment-related morbidity and mortality. This reduction in illness and death rates will bring an overall improvement in the health of the population and a reduction in health care expenditures. 

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