

## Direct from CDC's Environmental Health Services Branch

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# Revisiting Revitalization

*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 examines the origin of CDC's National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services, provides an overview of its blueprint for the work of revitalization, and briefly describes some results to date.*

**A**gainst the backdrop of a series of national environmental health problems in the 1990s—domestic and international terrorism and environmental health threats, dwindling resources, and, most importantly, a shrinking of the well-trained and experienced workforce—31 individuals representing 25 organizations, including NEHA, gathered in 2001 to discuss how to improve the practice of environmental public health. This group began by constructing concrete goals and objectives for the critical environmental public health service areas. These discussions became a draft strategy that was sent to 150 stakeholders for review and refinement. Now titled *A National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services*, this 51-page systematic approach for improving our profession and its delivery of services is available at our Web site at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs).

The overarching goal of the strategy is “to enhance and revitalize the system of environmental public health services (EPHS) to address the broad range of issues facing states and communities.” The underlying goals are to build capacity, support research, foster leadership, communicate and market, develop the workforce, and create strategic partnerships. These six goals and their 12 objectives (Figure 1) emphasize prevention of disease and mortality and capture a long-term vision for managing public health services that deal with environmental health-related issues.

CDC is one of the key organizations responsible for moving this strategy from planning to implementation. The Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB) of the National Center for Environmental Health manages the many revitalization projects and guides the in-

novative efforts needed to successfully execute the objectives of the strategy. Its accomplishments are helping CDC reach its 21st-century vision—healthy people in a healthy world through prevention—and provide needed national leadership and assistance to those working on the front lines of environmental public health in the more than 3,000 local, 400 tribal, and 50 state agencies in our nation.

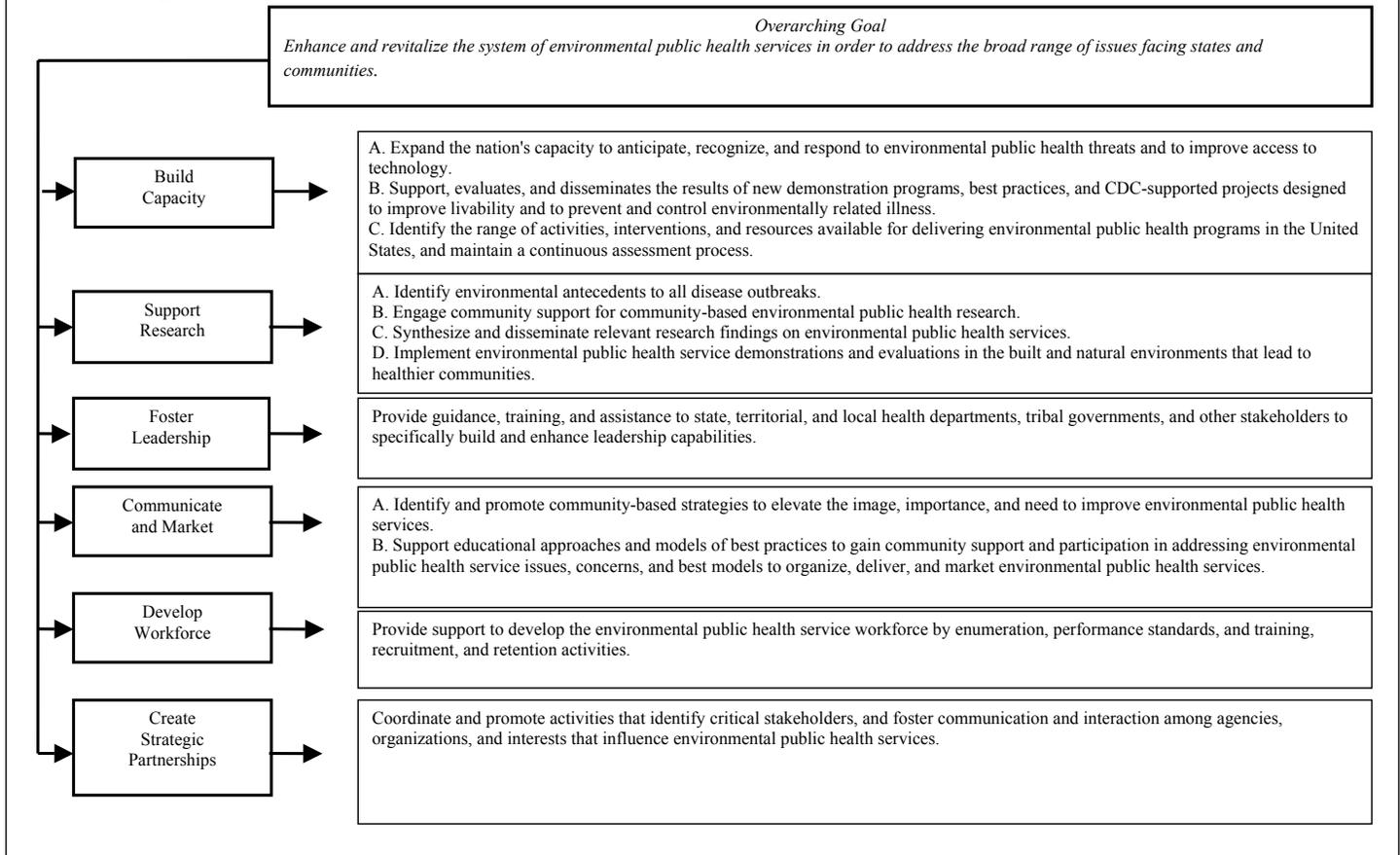
Many cross-cutting projects for improving the practice of environmental public health are under way. Under the auspices of the strategy's capacity-building goal, agencies and institutions in 10 states successfully competed for funding to build and improve environmental health capacity around the 10 essential services of public health ([www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/CapacityBuilding](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/CapacityBuilding)). Distance-learning and classroom-training programs, community environmental health assessments, and local mini-service grants were included in the more than 50 activities conducted in the initial round of these projects. One of them, the *Essential Services of Environmental Health* CD-ROM, includes five hours for a base course and an additional hour for each of six case studies in NEHA preapproved continuing-education (CE) credits, and was distributed to more than 3,000 state and local environmental health programs. (Readers can obtain copies at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs).)

A major effort aimed at the research goal of the strategy was a partnership between CDC and environmental health specialists, epidemiologists, and laboratorians in nine states to improve the practice of environmental health. This effort led to the development of the Environmental Health Services Network (EHS-Net), which endeavors to identify environmental antecedents (underlying factors) of

# FIGURE 1

## CDC's National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services: Goals and Strategies, 2003

A National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services



foodborne and waterborne illnesses and disease outbreaks and uses a systems-based approach to translate findings into improved prevention efforts. Readers will find more information on EHS-Net at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EHSNET](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EHSNET).

Strategic partnerships are bringing improvements in the field of environmental public health services and are a result of EHSB focusing attention on the goals of developing the workforce, fostering leadership, and improving our communication and marketing abilities. Successes in these areas include development and nationwide delivery of EPHS-related manuals, Web casts, training videos, and CD-ROMs (e.g., food safety, swimming pool outbreak investigations, healthy housing); creation of an Environmental Health Services Workforce Consortium with NEHA as the lead; and the launch of a newly created National Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute. In keeping with the current climate of public health readiness and early detection of

environment-related threats, a major Web resource for emergency preparedness for environmental health practitioners is now online ([www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ETP](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ETP)). To assist with workforce development and capacity building, CDC's EHSB has provided technical assistance and oversight in numerous outbreak investigations and other field projects related to drinking water, vector and rodent control, wastewater, and disaster assistance.

As we approach the five-year mark in our undertaking of revitalizing environmental public health services, it is important to evaluate our efforts. Although we believe that together we've made progress, we'd like to hear from you. Where do you think we might focus, refocus, or redouble our efforts? Please tell us about successful outcomes of your program's activities, innovative directions or purposes you have pursued, and activities or methods that have worked for your program. 🇺🇸

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### Did you know

The slogan, "Sanitation—the Beacon Light of Public Health," was adopted in 1932 by the California Association of Sanitarians, and an emblem featuring a shield with a beacon in the center was adopted December 11, 1937, at the first annual meeting of the National Association of Sanitarians (now called the National Environmental Health Association) in San Luis Obispo.