

Direct from CDC

Environmental Health Services Branch

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Revitalization: Are We There Yet?

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. EHSB staff will be highlighting a variety of concerns, opportunities, challenges, and successes that we all share in environmental public health.

Since the 2003 publication of *A National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services* (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Docs/nationalstrategy2003.pdf), EHSB and partners have been working to enhance and revitalize the system of environmental public health services (EPHS) to address the broad range of issues facing states and communities. The six goals of the strategy are to build capacity, support research, foster leadership, communicate and market, develop the workforce, and create strategic partnerships. These six goals and the 12 objectives that they comprise (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.

This column reports on activities undertaken under the rubric of the six goals.

Build Capacity

Agencies and institutions in 17 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/). The grantees described their successes in the July-August 2007 *Journal of Environmental Health* (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/CapacityBuilding/bc_jeh_ed.htm).

Grantee activities conducted in the initial rounds of these projects included distance-learning and classroom-training programs, community environmental health assessments, and local mini-service grants. One product, the *Essential Services of Environ-*

mental Health CD-ROM, earns users NEHA pre-approved continuing-education credits: five hours for a base course and an additional hour for each of six case studies. It was distributed to more than 3,000 state and local environmental health programs. (Readers can obtain copies at www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/.)

Support Research

CDC partnered with 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 Specialists Network (EHS-Net), which endeavors to identify environmental antecedents (underlying factors) of foodborne and waterborne illnesses and disease outbreaks and uses a systems-based approach to translate findings into improved prevention efforts. Updated and expanded information on EHS-Net can be found at www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EHSNET.

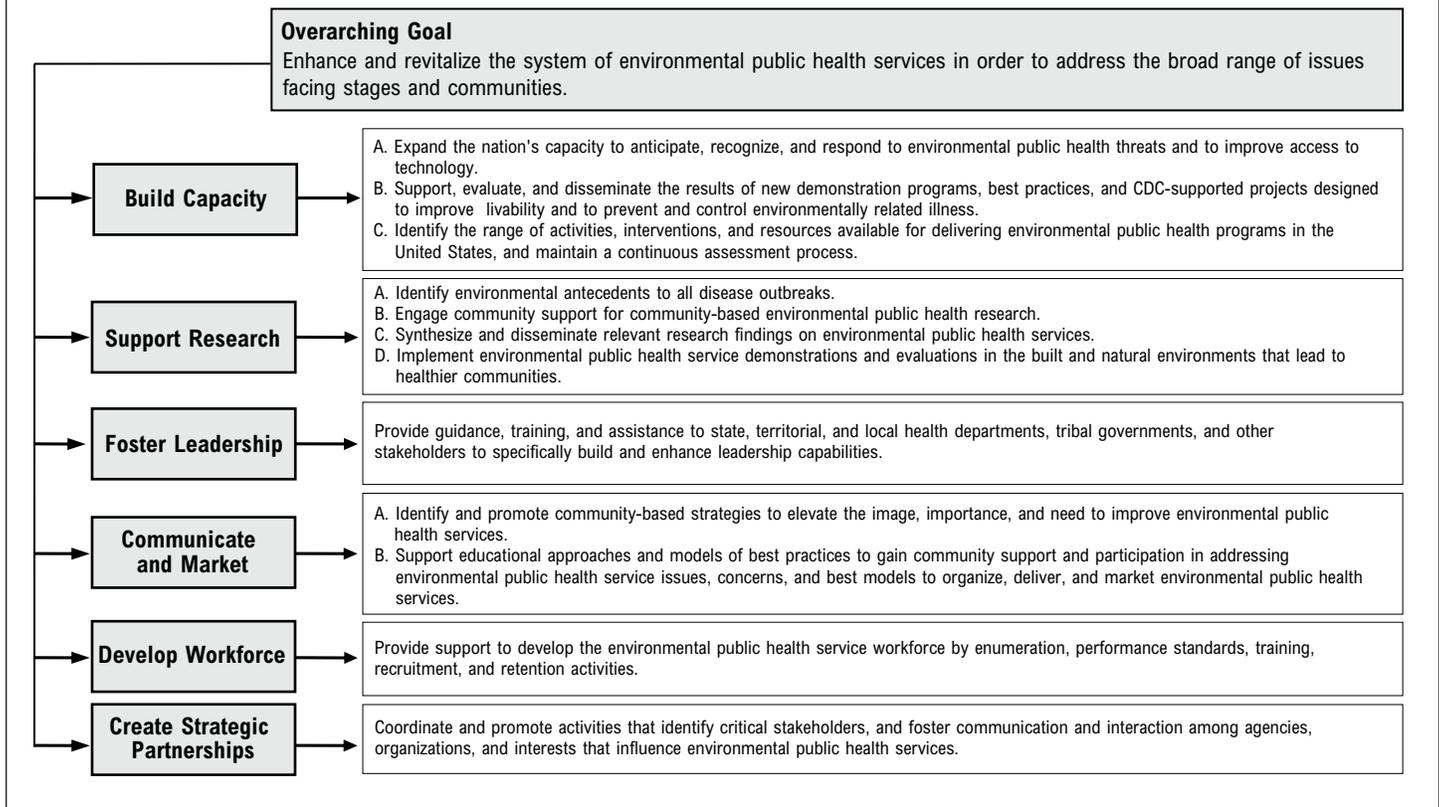
Create Strategic Partnerships

Strategic partnerships have resulted from EHSB focusing attention on the goals of developing the workforce, fostering leadership, and improving our communication and marketing abilities. Successes include development and nationwide delivery of EPHS-related manuals, Web casts, training videos, and CD-ROMs (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/) and creation of an Environmental Health Services Workforce Consortium with NEHA as the lead.

EHSB is also partnering with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to

FIGURE 1

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



strengthen coordination between environmental protection and public health programs. Such collaboration will reduce overlap and add synergy to ongoing community-based activities. The agencies are piloting the collaboration in four communities: Cerro Gordo, Iowa; the Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma; Savannah, Georgia; and Boston, Massachusetts (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/CEHA/epacollaboration.htm).

Foster Leadership

The National Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute (EPHLI) (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EPHLI), established in 2004, has trained 113 environmental health practitioners from federal, state, and local environmental and public health organizations (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ephli/fellows_mentors.htm). The EHSB column in the September issue of the *Journal* provided detailed information about EPHLI as well as information about applying for the class of 2008–2009.

Practitioners must be able to anticipate, recognize, and respond to many issues and threats. They must also stay current with all the latest information and technology avail-

able. To foster leadership in these areas, EHSB established a major Web resource for emergency preparedness for environmental health practitioners (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ETP).

Develop Workforce

To assist with workforce development as well as capacity building, EHSB has provided technical assistance and oversight in outbreak investigations and other field projects related to drinking water, vector and rodent control, wastewater, and disaster assistance.

In keeping with CDC's commitment to supporting the adoption and use of the National Public Health Performance Standards (NPHPS) as the blueprint for strengthening the infrastructure that supports public health systems, EHSB has developed complementary Environmental Public Health Performance Standards (EnvPHPS).

These standards can be used to assess local, state, and tribal capability to perform the 10 essential services of environmental public health at all levels. The standards will also more clearly describe what environmental health programs need to do to perform the 10 essential services.

Communicate and Market

EHSB continues to expand its Web site (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs). We recently updated with a new template, added an A-to-Z index, and expanded our environmental health topic pages. With users' needs in mind, we made content searchable by keyword or topic.

We Still Need Your Help

Evaluation of our efforts to revitalize environmental public health services is important. 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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