

Direct from CDC

Environmental Health Services Branch

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The Environmental Public Health Performance Standards: Strengthening the Nation's Environmental Public Health Infrastructure and Improving Environmental Health Practice

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 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.

In this column, EHSB and guest authors from across CDC will highlight a variety of concerns, opportunities, challenges, and successes that we all share in environmental public health. 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.

The conclusions in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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The National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) works with many partners to strengthen the nation's public health infrastructure and to improve environmental public health practice.

CDC is committed to supporting, adopting, and using National Public Health Performance Standards (NPHPS). In keeping with this commitment and to complement NPHPS, NCEH has developed draft Environmental Public Health Performance Standards (EnvPHPS).

In 2006, NCEH and its partners began working on EnvPHPS, available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EnvPHPS>. These standards are a companion module to the National Public Health Performance Standards (NPHPS), available at <http://www.cdc.gov/od/ocphp/nphps/>. Nationwide implementation of EnvPHPS at the state, tribal, and local levels will help NCEH build capacity, consistency, and accountability within and across the nation's environmental public health systems. Among other things, the standards are intended to describe more clearly what every program needs to do to perform optimally the 10 essential services of environmental public health.

CDC developed EnvPHPS nationally, in cooperation with key public health partner groups. Thus, the standards have a level of credibility that makes a strong argument for improving environmental public health practice. Others have recognized for their leadership those departments that have adopted the standards—and many if not all of those departments have shown measureable environmental health practice improvements. And

because the EnvPHPS were developed from a perspective of broad, systematic environmental health practice, the standards can be applied to virtually all environmental health and protection programs whether or not those programs reside in health departments.

EnvPHPS and NPHPS

The EnvPHPS align with the familiar NPHPS format. Using both instruments can assist in building understanding and teamwork between environmental health and other public health programs. In fact, the EnvPHPS can be used separately from or concurrently with the NPHPS to do the following.

- Assess the capacity of a state, tribal, or local jurisdiction to perform essential environmental health services; EnvPHPS is applicable at the program, agency, or system level.
- Identify and prioritize gaps in an environmental health system that inhibit or prevent that system from performing the 10 essential environmental health services.
- Develop an action plan to address identified gaps and address any other barriers to meeting the standards.
- Educate and train new and existing staff, other public health officials, policy makers, and elected officials about how environmental health can prevent disease and reduce hazards.
- Provide credible evidence to demonstrate the value of environmental health service programs and to justify the need for additional resources.
- Measure improvement in a system's capacity to deliver essential environmental health services.

EnvPHPS Status

A free, online continuing education course related to the standards is available through NEHA. The course can provide continuing education credit for environmental health practitioners and students and is available at <http://www.nehacert.org/joomlaupg/index.php>; click on CDC-Sponsored Workshops.

This summer, NCEH expects to release the EnvPHPS and begin analysis and reporting of submitted self-assessment data. NCEH encourages all environmental health jurisdictions to become familiar with these new standards and to promote their use actively.

EnvPHPS Data Use

NCEH will use information gathered via the EnvPHPS to identify the greatest environmental public health needs and match resources to those needs. This continuous process of identifying service gaps and focusing resources on them will strengthen the nation's environmental public health infrastructure. NCEH will use compiled capacity data from the self-assessment process to build an accurate picture of the challenges facing the nation's environmental public health services delivery systems. The data collection will also provide information to Congress and to federal, tribal, state, and local agencies; to foundations; and to universities regarding where best to focus resources for performance improvement.

Visit the EnvPHPS Web site at (<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EnvPHPS>) to download and use the draft standards, and to access online resources, including the free online training offered by NEHA with CDC support. Link to the NPHPS to obtain more information about how the EnvPHPS were developed.

The EnvPHPS Web site will also include

- a tool kit,
- data entry and reporting capabilities for users, and
- an evaluation component to assess the effectiveness of the tool in improving capacity, the environment, and public health.

For additional information on EnvPHPS, e-mail Jsarisky@cdc.gov.

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