

# EPHOC: A New Training Resource for the Environmental Public Health Workforce

Wayne Studyvin, PE, MSCE  
Tom Struzick, MSW/ACSW, LCSW/MEd

**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.

Wayne Studyvin manages the largest and most comprehensive local environmental health program in Alabama. Tom Struzick is a program manager in the University of Alabama—School of Public Health's Center for the Study of Community Health.

An *epoch* is a time marked by an event that begins a new period or development. The training resource described in this column is indeed an epoch in the world of environmental public health (EPH) practice and workforce development in that a new period of training is about to begin. Thus, we present EPHOC—Environmental Public Health Online Courses.

Access to affordable and worthwhile workforce development resources for practitioners in EPH has been a major issue of concern across the U.S. for the past decade or more.

The Local Health Department Workforce 2005 National Profile (National Association of County and City Health Officials [NACCHO], 2007) stated that many local health departments did not have

- the basic workforce development infrastructure needed to ensure competent staff,
- sufficient training budgets, or
- designated staff persons to coordinate or conduct training.

To address these issues, the Jefferson County [Alabama] Department of Health (JCDH) Environmental Health Services, two training and

research centers at the School of Public Health at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), NEHA, and the CDC Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB) partnered to develop a comprehensive, online, on-demand package of courses for EPH practitioners. These courses align with chapters in the NEHA *Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) Study Guide* (3rd edition, 2006). In addition to the study guide, the primary reference source for the courses is *Environmental Engineering* (Salvato, Nemerow, & Agardy, 2003).

Online learning was selected as the mechanism for delivering the courses. This mechanism is cost-effective and time efficient. It allows learners to move at their own pace through the courses they select with 24/7 access. The courses are housed in and accessed through a learning management system (LMS) operated by the South Central Center for Public Health Preparedness, a partnership between UAB and the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. The LMS keeps track of participants and can provide individuals with information on courses they have completed.

EHSB's Innovation Team leader, Charles Otto, said, "In this day of tight travel budgets and stretched-to-the-maximum EPH workforce, this distance-learning format is an ideal way of providing top-quality training opportunities for our frontline partners in our important local, state, tribal, and territorial environmental health programs." He also noted that EPHOC is very complementary to our current in-depth free distance-learning courses (<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs>) provided in partnership with NEHA. Enrollment in these courses has exceeded 9,000 practitioners to date.

Reprinted with permission from NEHA

TABLE 1

**EPHOC (Environmental Public Health Online Courses)**

| Courses*                                       | Instructor                        | Affiliation   |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. General Environmental Health                | Sharunda Buchanan<br>Charles Otto | CDC/NCEH/EEHS<br>CDC/NCEH/EEHS/EHSB                       |
| 2. Statutes and Regulations                    | David Maxey                       | Jefferson County Department of Health                     |
| 3. Food Protection                             | Alan Tart                         | U.S. Food and Drug Administration                         |
| 4. Potable Water                               | Joe Cotruvo<br>Mike Herring       | Joseph Cotruvo & Associates<br>CDC/NCEH/EEHS/EHSB         |
| 5. Wastewater                                  | Allen Tartt                       | AOWA Training Center, University of West Alabama          |
| 6. Solid and Hazardous Waste                   | Jason Kirby                       | UAB School of Engineering                                 |
| 7. Hazardous Materials                         | Jason Kirby                       | UAB School of Engineering                                 |
| 8. Zoonoses, Vectors, Pests, and Weeds         | Matt Vanderpool                   | Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness |
| 9. Radiation Protection                        | Norman Bolus                      | UAB SHP Nuclear Med Tech Program                          |
| 10. Occupational Safety and Health             | Elizabeth Maples                  | UAB SOPH EHS  |
| 11. Air Quality and Environmental Noise        | Corey Masuca                      | Jefferson County Department of Health                     |
| 12. Housing Sanitation and Safety              | Genevieve Birkby                  | Baltimore City Health Department                          |
| 13. Institutions and Licensed Establishments   | Leon F. Vinci                     | Health Promotion Consultants                              |
| 14. Swimming Pools and Recreational Facilities | Troy Perry                        | Jefferson County Department of Health                     |
| 15. Disaster Sanitation                        | Mark Miller                       | CDC/NCEH/EEHS/EHSB  |

NEHA will award preapproved continuing education credit for each course successfully completed.

\* Numbers correlate to chapters in the NEHA *Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) Study Guide* (3rd edition, 2006).

Abbreviations: AOWA: Alabama Onsite Wastewater Training Center; CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; EEHS: Division of Emergency and Environmental Health Services; EHSB: Environmental Health Services Branch; NCEH: National Center for Environmental Health; SHP: School of Health Professions; SOPH EHS: School of Public Health Environmental Health Sciences; UAB: University of Alabama Birmingham.

The EPHOC training package for EPH practitioners is the first of its kind for public health: discipline-specific workforce development training. No other disciplines have such a complete overview of their specific work in public health.

The courses are designed for two EPH audiences:

- new EPH hires who want to learn about the broad field of EPH practice at the same time they are learning about their particular EPH jobs and
- more-experienced EPH staff who are ready to pursue professional credentialing and are preparing to take the NEHA or state-level REHS/RS examination.

The courses are taught by a group of EPH subject-matter experts from across the country. Table 1 shows the 15 courses and instructors for a total of over 45 hours of training. The instructor group is a mix of academic professors and EPH practitioners in different agency settings who planned their courses, determined their instructional formats, and made “lecture-style” presenta-

tions. Each course includes a pretest, a number of individual 40- to 60-minute modules, and a posttest. Course content includes the various roles and responsibilities of EPH staff. Some of the instructors also provided additional readings for their courses.

The package was developed between 2006 and 2009 in response to the work of members of a task force of JCDH environmentalists. This task force was established in the summer of 2005 to make recommendations about ways for JCDH to pursue development of its EPH workforce members’ core competencies and attainment of NEHA REHS/RS credentialing. The NEHA credentialing process, particularly the REHS/RS examination, was selected as the “gold standard” to guide the development of the training courses.

The emergence of EPHOC means a new day for employees in EPH practice and workforce development. EHSB and NEHA are pleased to be a part of this national epoch in training. NEHA will be awarding preapproved continuing education credit for successful completion of each of the 15 courses. As noted by

Rob Blake, EHSB chief, “EPHOC moves the old CDC Environmental Health Homestudy Course series into a new millennium.”

EPHOC rollout details are available on the EHSB Web site ([www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Workforce\\_Development/EPHOC.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Workforce_Development/EPHOC.htm)). Click the “updates” button in the top right area of the EHSB homepage ([www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs)) to receive e-mail updates when EPHOC courses open for free enrollment in early 2010. 🐼

**Corresponding Author:** Tom Struzick, Program Manager, UAB School of Public Health, 2001 3rd Avenue South, Suite 1081, Birmingham, AL 35294-0001. E-mail: [toms@uab.edu](mailto:toms@uab.edu).

## References

- National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2007). *The local health department workforce: Findings from the 2005 national profile of local health departments*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Salvato, J.A., Nemerow, N.L., & Agardy, F.J. (2003). *Environmental engineering* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.