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Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net) 2010–2015: The New Funding Cycle

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 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Environmental Health Services Branch is funding a new national extramural program, "Revitalizing Core Environmental Health Programs Through the Environmental Health Specialists Network (EHS-Net)." This program merges the Environmental Health Capacity Building Program and EHS-Net into one comprehensive program with practice (nonresearch) and research components relevant to food and water safety. The funding cycle for this program is July 1, 2010–June 30, 2015. With this new

cycle, the capacity-building program and the EHS-Net program are under the same EHS-Net umbrella. This program will provide opportunities for the EHS-Net grantees to conduct research on environmental causes of foodborne and waterborne illness, apply that research to environmental health practice where possible, and develop new ideas for further research.

Capacity Building (Practice)

CDC began funding practice cooperative agreements to state and local health programs and universities in 2001 to build environmen-

tal health capacity in their jurisdictions. CDC has funded three cycles of this program. For previous grantees, see www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/CapacityBuilding/BuildCapacity.htm.

Practice grantee activities were built on a framework based on the 10 Essential Public Health Services, the Essential Environmental Services, Core Competencies of Effective Practice of Environmental Health, and CDC's A National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services. (See www.cdc.gov/od/ocphp/nphsp/EssentialPHServices.htm; www.nwcphp.org/centers-projects/environmental-health-center/10-essential; www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Corecomp/Core_Competencies_EH_Practice.pdf; or www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Docs/NationalStrategy2003.pdf).

The products and toolkits developed by these funded partners were designed to be models that other environmental health programs could use to deliver environmental health services, improve environmental health capacity to respond to current and emerging health threats, and expand the science-base in environmental public health to improve public health practice (CDC, 2009a). In an effort to capture the lessons learned from the past capacity-building programs, an online catalog was developed featuring tools and products developed by these formerly funded partners. The interactive product catalog is available at www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/CapacityBuilding/healthy_town.htm.

EHS-Net (Research)

CDC began funding EHS-Net cooperative agreements with state and local health departments in 2000. EHS-Net originally sprang from the Foodborne Diseases Active

TABLE 1

2010–2015 EHS-NET Funded Programs

Type of Program	Type of Project
Research Programs	
California State Department of Health	Both food and water
Georgia State Department of Health*	Both food and water
Minnesota State Department of Health	Both food and water
New York State Department of Health	Both food and water
New York City Health Department, NY	Food
Rhode Island State Department of Health	Food
Tennessee State Department of Health	Both food and water
Practice Programs	
Cerro Gordo County Health Department, IA	Water
New York State Department of Health	Both food and water
San Mateo County Health Department, CA	Food
Tennessee State Department of Health	Food

*Georgia Department of Public Health is a former EHS-Net research food and water grantee from the 2005–2010 project cycle working to complete activities through approved CDC guidance.

Surveillance Network (FoodNet), the principal foodborne disease component of CDC's Emerging Infections Program (EIP) (see www.cdc.gov/foodnet/). Thus, EHS-Net also had a food focus; specifically, its goals were to understand the environmental causes of foodborne illness and to improve environmental public health practice. EHS-Net has since become independent from FoodNet and expanded in 2006 to include drinking-water safety. CDC has funded two other cycles of EHS-Net grantees prior to this new cycle; for previous grantees see www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EHSNet.

To meet its goals, EHS-Net collaborates with a forum of environmental health specialists, epidemiologists, and laboratorians (CDC, 2009b) from CDC, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and funded local and state partners (Table 1).

Why the Merger?

Capacity Building Transformed into EHS-Net

In an effort to bridge gaps between practice and research and identify solutions relevant

to food and water safety, one comprehensive program was needed. This combination of practice and research programs allows for better program alignment and connecting research with the implementation components to better demonstrate effect. For example, Tennessee and New York (State Departments of Health) are both practice- and research-funded partners; New York State is funded for both food and water (Table 1). This creates the opportunity for practice programs to identify gaps and potential research needs and for research programs to generate potential practical applications from their findings.

Combining practice and research allows systems theory, a general science of wholeness, to be demonstrated at its best. Rather than dissecting a complex process and studying the individual parts, systems theory focuses on understanding the complete system and the underlying interactions of all the forces that make up that system.

The goals for the research component of the EHS-Net program for this new funding cycle are to 1) identify and understand environmental factors associated with foodborne and waterborne illness; 2) increase and

improve data collected from environmental assessments conducted during outbreak investigations; 3) evaluate environmental health programs of funded partners and the overall EHS-Net program; and 4) disseminate research findings to environmental public health programs. The goals for the practice component of the new funding cycle are to 1) develop and implement demonstration, pilot, or intervention projects based on assessment of community food or water environmental service gaps; 2) translate EHS-Net research to develop and implement demonstration, pilot, or intervention projects; 3) evaluate the effects of the interventions; and 4) develop products and share findings of interventions with other communities.

This merging of EHS-Net research and practice programs provides a unique opportunity to understand the environmental causes and prevention of foodborne and waterborne disease. This comprehensive approach could ultimately affect policy and practices in environmental health related to food and water safety to improve the overall public health of a community. 🌱

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