

# TRACKING TRIBUNE

## MILESTONES

The volume of scientific data accessible on the Tracking Network continues to increase. This summer alone, the Tracking Network released data for four new cancers related to tobacco smoking including esophageal, larynx, oral, and pancreatic cancers. Additionally, now when you search Climate Change data, you will find over 30 years (1979-2011) of weather data on extreme heat days and events and temperature distribution.

The variety and quality of our environmental, health, and behavioral data makes the Tracking Network appealing to public health professionals, scientific researchers, doctors and nurses, and more. In fact, in September, the Tracking Network reached a milestone and surpassed 100,000 data query requests. The most queried data are currently related to PM2.5 (or fine particulate matter) followed closely by childhood asthma rates. The number of queries will continue to increase as we work to expand our current data sets and add new content.

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## INNOVATIONS

Pennsylvania's Tracking Program is part of an exciting new initiative called Pennsylvania Going Green. The top priority of Pennsylvania's Going Green Initiative is to protect the health of people who work in and children who attend daycare and homecare centers from exposures at investigated hazardous waste sites.

The Pennsylvania Tracking Program is collaborating with the state's Health Assessment Program (HAP), the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) on this project. Working with HAP, the Pennsylvania Tracking Program has created a software application that allows DPW to assess whether any existing or proposed children's daycare and homecare centers would be located within an eighth of a mile of a documented, potentially hazardous waste site. Using information about contaminated and potentially contaminated sites from the state's HAP database, the Pennsylvania Tracking Program geocoded all sites investigated by the HAP and worked collaboratively to design a software program to visualize this information from 122 HAP documents.

This new mapping capability will significantly contribute to the identification of potentially hazardous sites that could have adverse effects on adults and children in daycare and homecare centers. It is through innovations like this that Pennsylvania's Tracking Program is using environmental health surveillance data to protect the public health of Pennsylvanians.



# TRACKING MATTERS

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Investigating Suspected Cancer Clusters and Responding to Community Concerns: Guidelines for CDC and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists was released in the September 27, 2013 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This report relied heavily on the expertise of many Environmental Public Health Tracking Program personnel. The guidelines outline a four-step approach for managing a reported cluster and updating procedures originally published in 1990. State and local health departments can use these guidelines to develop a systematic approach for responding to community concerns regarding cancer clusters.

View the MMWR online:  
[http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr6208a1.htm?s\\_cid=rr6208a1\\_w](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr6208a1.htm?s_cid=rr6208a1_w)

## INTRODUCING TRACKING TO MPH STUDENTS

Recently, members of CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Program were interviewed by MPHProgramList.com to discuss the Tracking Network and his or her role in the program. One representative was selected from each area of expertise (epidemiology, informatics, communications, and program services) to describe the benefits of the Tracking Network as a resource to MPH students. Dr. Ekta Choudhary, Mr. Patrick Wall, Ms. Jennifer Moore, and Mr. Larry Franklin relayed their experiences in different aspects of the Tracking Program and offered suggestions to MPH students interested in a career in environmental public health tracking.

View the interviews online:  
<http://mphprogramslist.com/interviews/>

## TRACKING IN ACTION

### Oregon

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer and is the leading environmental cause of cancer deaths in the United States. Radon is a colorless, odorless, tasteless radioactive gas. Testing is the only way to know if radon levels are high in a building or home. In 1993, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency identified Oregon as having low to moderate levels of radon. However, recent data show that some areas of the state have high radon levels. The state needed more accurate data on radon hazards to promote testing.

The Oregon Tracking Program and partners developed maps showing radon hazards for areas smaller than counties. Tracking staff used these maps to support public education to encourage in-home radon testing during January 2013, Radon Action Month. They published the radon maps on the health department's Radon Program web pages and on Oregon Tracking's Facebook page. Television news coverage and two front-page articles in The Oregonian newspaper about the maps helped raise public awareness of radon hazards and encourage radon testing. Following the media coverage, monthly average visits to the Radon Program's web pages tripled. Data from the American Lung Association (ALA) of Oregon showed that they sold nearly 300 test kits during the first day the front page Oregonian article ran. Within three days, ALA sold more radon test kits online than they did in the entire year of 2012. Increases in radon testing likely will lead to more people taking steps to decrease the amount of radon they come in contact with.

# TRACKING MATTERS

## TRACKING IN ACTION

### **New Mexico**

The New Mexico Tracking Program recently formed the Cancer Concerns Workgroup to provide a coordinated and efficient response to citizen concerns about environmentally-related health conditions and potential cancer clusters. The workgroup included professionals from cancer, chronic disease, and environmental health. With guidance from the tracking program, the workgroup developed a protocol for timely and consistent response and created a secure Cancer Concerns Database to log and track inquiries. The New Mexico Tracking Program provides information about cancer risks, prevention messages, and data to use in responses.

Prior to the protocol implemented by the Cancer Concerns Workgroup, multiple agencies could respond differently to an inquiry to a concern about a perceived cancer cluster. Now, concerned citizens receive a quicker and more thorough response from a team of professionals. Instead of a process that could take weeks to draft an initial response to an inquiry, the team can prepare an adequate response within 24 hours.

## RESOURCES

January is Radon Action Month and Birth Defect Awareness Month. Check out these resources that can help you plan awareness activities:

- Environmental Protection Agency's Radon Outreach Kit  
([http://www.epa.gov/radon/pdfs/radon\\_outreach\\_kit.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/radon/pdfs/radon_outreach_kit.pdf) )
- National Birth Defects Prevention Network's 2014 Birth Defects Prevention Month Toolkit  
(<http://www.nbdpn.org/bdpm2014.php> )
- CDC Tracking Network's Birth Defects Communication Toolkit  
([http://ephtracking.cdc.gov/docs/BirthDefectsToolkit\\_Final.pdf](http://ephtracking.cdc.gov/docs/BirthDefectsToolkit_Final.pdf) )