

# Three Rivers District Health Department Sets Example by Splashing into Health: Case Study



## Participating in CDC's Work@Health® Program



TRDHD employees in front of the main office.  
Photo provided by TRDHD.

Before TRDHD participated in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Work@Health® program, it had only a few policies in place to support employee health and wellness, including smoke-free vehicles and facilities. It did not have a dedicated person to coordinate worksite health

promotion, which made it challenging to implement employee health promotion efforts. One advantage that TRDHD did have was its ongoing involvement in community health activities in the four counties it serves. These activities included a 5K run and weight loss challenges that TRDHD employees could participate in at no cost.

With training and effort, employers of all sizes and types can plan and implement a workplace health program. Employers can learn from the experiences of employers like TRDHD how to plan strategies and anticipate implementation challenges.

In early 2014, TRDHD Community Health Planner Dianne Coleman received an e-mail from a colleague about the Work@Health® program. The free training and potential seed funding to support worksite health promotion sparked Coleman's interest, and she decided to apply for the chance to jump-start TRDHD's program.

The [Work@Health®](#) Program is designed to teach employers how to improve the health of their workers (and workers' families) by using prevention and wellness strategies that focus on chronic health conditions. Well-designed, science-based, and comprehensive workplace wellness programs can improve the health of individuals and companies, lower health care costs, and increase worker productivity.

## Organization Background

Three Rivers District Health Department

- « Established in 2010
- « Government agency
- « Industry sector: Health care and social assistance
- « Locations: Carrollton, Falmouth, Owenton, and Warsaw counties, Kentucky
- « 66 Employees
- « 91% women, 9% men

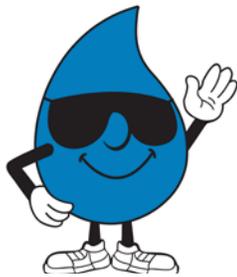
The Three Rivers District Health Department (TRDHD) is working to deliver essential public health services in the best way possible through employee training, an "All One Team" attitude, and a multifaceted public health effort that includes programs, policies, and preventive services. TRDHD serves four Kentucky counties in the northern part of the state: Carroll, Gallatin, Owen, and Pendleton. Each county has its own health center and local board of health. TRDHD serves a large geographical area of mainly small, rural communities.

TRDHD was selected to participate in the online version of the Work@Health® training program, which allowed Coleman the flexibility to move through the eight training modules at her own pace at the times most convenient to her. The training was held in June 2014 and followed by 6-10 months of personalized technical assistance from a trained Work@Health® provider.

## Program Overview

### Creating a Committee and Assessing Needs

After the Work@Health® training, Coleman set up several activities and environmental changes to support a worksite health program at TRDHD. First, she changed TRDHD's community planning team, which had representatives from each of the four county health centers, to a wellness committee. That way, each health center had a wellness champion for its local community. The committee used TRDHD's logo of three interconnected rivers and its water droplet mascot, Splash, to create the motto "Splash Into Health."



TRDHD logo and mascot, Splash.  
Graphic provided by TRDHD.

The wellness committee used methods from the Work@Health® module, Assessing Your Worksite, to collect information about employee needs and interests before planning its program. The committee surveyed employees about the amount of time they spent sitting during the work day, their overall physical and mental health, and how TRDHD could

Employers selected to participate in Work@Health® were assigned to one of three models, all of which delivered the same comprehensive workplace health curriculum.

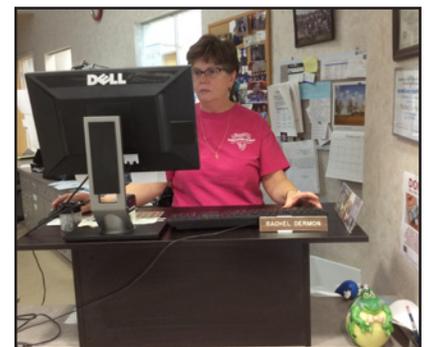
1. The hands-on model was an on-site, instructor-led one-day training workshop held in one of six regional locations.
2. The online model allowed employers to move through the curriculum independently over several weeks using a web-based learning platform.
3. The blended model included a combination of hands-on and online learning strategies.

help them improve their quality of life. It used the results to select several strategies that focused on improving nutrition and weight management and increasing physical activity.

### Standing Up and Moving More

The survey data showed that many employees spent 6 or more hours each day sitting at their desks and that employees had a strong interest in having more ways to be physically active at work. To meet this need, TRDHD used seed funding from Work@Health® to buy 10 standing desks for employees who indicated a strong interest in using one and who spent at least 6 hours sitting. These employees also had to agree to complete a three-month evaluation tool about the work stations. The wellness committee has received positive feedback from those employees who completed the standing work station assessment tool. The majority reported that the standing desk has made a difference in their ability to focus and that they feel better.

The wellness committee also bought copies of [WELCOA's](#) Walking 4 Wellness book for employees and persuaded its health insurance carrier to donate wearable tracking devices for 20 employees who participated in a TRDHD weight loss challenge.

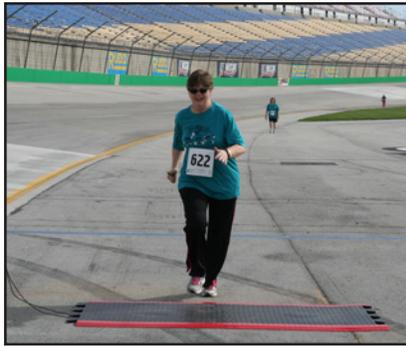


TRDHD employee using a standing desk.  
Photo provided by TRDHD.

TRDHD has always encouraged employees to participate in 5Ks in their communities. As part of its expanded activities after participating in the Work@Health® program, TRDHD offered employees the chance to win an extra vacation day as an incentive to participate in local 5Ks. In spring 2015, the wellness committee also organized a 5K walk/run in which 18 employees participated and held a

drawing for a wearable fitness tracking device—an incentive that proved to be more popular than the extra vacation day.

The committee also used environmental supports and activities to promote better nutrition and weight management, adopting a more comprehensive approach to



*TRDHD employee participating in the organization's 5K walk/run. Photo provided by TRDHD.*

worksite wellness. It bought water coolers for each health center and gave employees a tool that can be placed on a food plate to measure portion size. In 2014, the committee organized a weight loss challenge that was so popular, it spurred another challenge for 13 weeks in early 2015. Twenty employees—nearly one-third of the staff—participated in the challenge.

In addition, the wellness committee put some of the materials it received from the Work@Health® training into practice by improving communications about its program and adding nutrition and physical activity tips in its monthly newsletter for employees.

### **Integrating Employee Health into Organizational Objectives**

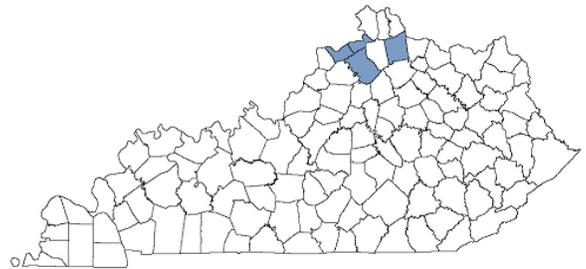
The employee interests survey data also helped the committee get a commitment from TRDHD's leadership to integrate worksite wellness into the health department's strategic plan. The strategic planning team, which represents employees from different TRDHD locations, created a map that showed what resources and support employees needed to effectively deliver public health services

### **Program Success**

Coleman said she believes that TRDHD's most significant achievement is learning how to develop a worksite wellness program and making that program part of the organization's strategic plan. She also believes that the director's commitment to the program has been key to its success, and that this support will make it more likely that other agency

to their communities. Developing internal wellness programs emerged as a key way to make the health department more credible in the community and more effective in its mission to improve the overall health of the district.

According to Coleman, the wellness committee also realized that TRDHD employees needed to be role models for their communities. Making worksite wellness part of the organization's strategic plan was a huge step toward creating a sustainable culture of health.



*Kentucky Counties Served by the Three Rivers District Health Department.*

Applying what Coleman learned from the "Assessing Your Worksite" module, TRDHD worked with its health insurance carrier to offer employees free biometric screenings at one of its on-site, all-day staff trainings. About 20% of employees took advantage of the screening, and the results were submitted to the employees and the insurance carrier. The wellness committee also plans to use the results to design future worksite wellness activities.

*"If we're not healthy, how can we expect the community to listen to us?"*

*—Diane Coleman, Community Health Planner*

leaders will get on board. Another achievement was the wellness committee's efforts to assess employees' health status and interests. Partnering with TRDHD's insurance carrier has allowed the committee to collect biometric data that will guide the committee's wellness plan and promote future collaborations.

Like all of the employers participating in the Work@Health® program, TRDHD used the [CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard](#) to assess the extent to which it had evidence-based health promotion strategies in place before they started the program in 2014 and again at the end of the program in 2015. The ScoreCard is a free tool that employers can use to assess their health promotion and disease prevention programs, identify gaps, and set priorities across health topics. Strategies assessed by the ScoreCard include health promoting counseling services, environmental supports, policies, health plan benefits, and other worksite interventions shown to be effective in preventing heart disease, stroke, and related health conditions.

TRDHD increased its total ScoreCard score from 90 to 167 out of a possible 264 points. It tripled its score in the area of Organizational Supports, which includes key elements for building the foundation for a healthy worksite, like strong leadership support. The Work@Health® curriculum stressed the importance of establishing organizational support for health promotion to build an infrastructure and support a sustainable program. TRDHD's improvements included its assessment of employee needs and interests, which was used to plan health promotion activities and setting up a health promotion committee.

TRDHD also increased the number of evidence-based strategies it offered to increase physical activity and improve nutrition. Examples of evidence-based strategies TRDHD put in place during their Work@Health® training using the ScoreCard that it did not have in place in 2014, included:

- Offering or promoting an on-site or nearby farmers' market where fresh fruits and vegetables are sold.
- Providing educational seminars, workshops, or classes on nutrition.
- Providing free or subsidized lifestyle self-management programs that include advice on physical activity.
- Providing other environmental supports for recreation or physical activity, such as standing desks.

**CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard Overall Score in Wellness Programming, 2014-2015**



Looking back on her experience with the Work@Health® program, Coleman attributes much of the positive change at TRDHD to the knowledge she gained through training, as well as the seed funding she received because it “allowed us to explore something we could offer to staff. It was the spark that started things.” Coleman said the training taught her how to make the business case for worksite health promotion and frame the message about return on investment in terms of the value of having happier employees, not just the dollar amount saved.

Coleman said she also found that going through the curriculum “opened your eyes to things you needed to be more aware of.” As a result, TRDHD’s wellness committee is looking beyond weight management and physical activity to identify the effect that health can have on employee productivity. An employee survey conducted in January 2015 had several questions from CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey. Employees rated both their physical and mental health as “not good” on about 8 days of the previous month.

This information served as an indicator of the level of presenteeism, the problem of workers’ being on the job but, because of health issues, not working at full potential. This in turn could have a costly negative effect on productivity. The committee would not have had this information to start working with if it had not included these questions in the survey. Now that leadership is aware of these results, TRDHD plans to conduct this survey every year, with the hope of seeing improvements in employees’ physical and mental health over time. Changes will be tracked and used to improve TRDHD’s wellness program as needed.

In addition to the curriculum, Coleman said she found the support of the Work@Health® technical assistance provider (TAP) crucial to keeping her efforts going, especially because of her competing

job responsibilities. She was comfortable contacting the provider at any time, and the provider sent her information about several resources, including links to tools and books.

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## Learning from Work@Health®

After the online Work@Health® training, all participants were asked to complete a survey, and most rated the training favorably in their responses to the following statements:

- I understand how to apply what I learned at the training at my job (86% agreed).
- I will be able to use what I learned in this training at my job (87% agreed).
- I would recommend this online training to others in my position (81% agreed).

Participants were also asked to share the lessons they had learned. Coleman said she had learned that, "It is

not always important to focus on the financial return on investments but to look at return on value with employees." She also said that she particularly liked the presentations and the resources provided as part of the training.

About 6 months later, participants were asked to complete surveys about what they had done since the training. All participants reported that they had used the information they had learned to develop a worksite health plan and collect the data they needed to set up worksite health programs. In addition, about 75% of participants said they had shared the information they had learned with others in their organization and used it to get leadership support.

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## Challenges

One challenge for TRDHD's worksite wellness program is that its health centers are spread across four rural counties, with one of the centers located nearly 1 hour away from the others. Coleman works to overcome this problem by giving all of the locations a voice, including all representatives from all centers on the wellness committee, and making

sure that employees at all locations have the same opportunities to fill out interest and satisfaction surveys about worksite wellness. The committee also sent the standing desks and water coolers to all of the centers so that employees at all locations could take advantage of these new resources made possible by the Work@Health® program.

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## What's Next?

Over the next 12 months, TRDHDC plans the following activities for worksite health promotion:

- Finish an evaluation of the standing desk initiative.
- Present data from the standing desk evaluation and other sources to the health department director and the board of health.
- Use results from the biometric screening in its worksite wellness plan for next year.
- Use data on employee health interests to develop lunch and learn sessions and other activities that are low cost and easy to set up.



*The Work@Health® employer-training program is an initiative of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to promote workplace wellness through employer education, training, and technical assistance. Work@Health® training provides employers with knowledge and tools through a comprehensive curricula to promote good health in their work places to prevent or reduce chronic illness and disability, and improve productivity.*