

Environmental Public Health Tracking: 2007 Tracking Awareness Assessment Summary

Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) Program is a multi-disciplinary collaboration that involves the ongoing collection, integration, analysis, and dissemination of data from environmental hazard monitoring, human exposure surveillance, and health effects surveillance. As part of its EPHT Program's efforts, CDC, along with state and local health departments, is leading an initiative to build a National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network. With the national EPHT Network as its cornerstone, the EPHT Program is the response to calls for more effective data collection and analyses that can improve the public's health.¹

In July 2007, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), and the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) conducted an online assessment to gauge the awareness and current needs in Environmental Public Health Tracking among key stakeholder groups. This online assessment on Environmental Public Health Tracking was a self-selected study comprised of nine questions pertaining to respondent characteristics and Environmental Public Health Tracking awareness, value, education, and resources. The online assessment was distributed via email, newsletters and listserv and promoted at the NACCHO and NEHA annual conferences. Computer workstations were available at the NACCHO annual conference for participants to complete the online assessment, and information was posted on the NEHA Web site with a link to the survey. 206 members from state and local health departments, schools of public health, and public health associations responded to this assessment. Respondents were not required to provide identifying information, defined as name, email, and address.

¹ Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, *Environmental Public Health Tracking Program* Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/background.htm>
Accessed 08-08-2007.

Respondent Characteristics

Place of Employment

Participants were asked to indicate their place of employment. Table 1 shows 42 percent of respondents represented local jurisdictions and 36 percent of respondents represented states. 22 percent of the remaining respondents represented the federal government, academic institutions and other organizations.

Table 1. Employment	Number	Percent
Local or county government	87	42.0
State government	73	36.0
Other (Public sector association, private sector etc.)	20	9.6
Federal government	16	7.7
University or college	9	4.3
Unknown	1	0.4

Work Background

Respondents were asked the discipline in which they primarily work or have received training and instructed to check all that apply. As indicated in Table 2, environmental health and public health were the most identified disciplines.

* Table 2. Areas of work and training	Number	Percent
Environmental health	164	81.0
Public health	136	67.0
Epidemiology	96	47.0
Chemistry	44	22.0
Toxicology	36	18.0
Microbiology	34	17.0
Biostatistics	34	17.0
Law or public policy	29	14.0
Business or management	26	13.0
Communications	21	10.0
Marketing or public relations	12	6.0
Information sciences	11	5.0
Economics	9	4.0
Internal medicine	7	3.0
Nursing	4	2.0

*Respondents were instructed to check all that apply, thus percentages shown here add to greater than 100 percent.

Memberships & Affiliations

Respondents were asked if they are members of the following associations/groups: National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), National Association of City and Council Health Officials (NACCHO), Association of State and Territorial Health Officials State Environmental Health Directors (ASTHO SEHD), or other. Table 3 displays respondent membership.

*Table 3. Membership	Number	Percent
NEHA member	65	45.0
NACCHO member	44	31.0
ASTHO State Environmental Health Directors	23	16.0
Others (CSTE, APHA, ISEE etc.)	60	42.0

*Respondents were instructed to check all that apply, thus percentages shown here add to greater than 100 percent.

Funding Profile

Of the respondents who provided identifying information, 43.6 percent are in states *not* funded by the CDC National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program. Table 4 illustrates the funding profile of respondents.

Table 4. Respondents	Number	Percent
CDC EPHT unfunded states	90	43.6
CDC EPHT funded states	53	25.8
Unknown	63	30.6

Tracking Awareness

Knowledge of the development of the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Network varied among respondents:

- **40 percent** (n=83) of respondents said they have **very little or no knowledge** of the development of the National EPHT Program and Network.
- **27 percent** (n=55) indicated that they have **some knowledge** of the development of the National EPHT Program and Network.
- **20 percent** (n=42) noted that they have a **fairly high knowledge** of the development of the National EPHT Program and Network.
- **13 percent** (n=26) reported a **very high knowledge** of the development of the National EPHT Program and Network.

Table 5 illustrates the awareness of the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Network by the respondent's membership organization/affiliation.

*Table 5. Awareness	Very little or no knowledge	Some knowledge	Fairly high knowledge	Very high knowledge
NACCHO Member	52% (n=23)	16% (n=7)	25% (n=11)	7% (n=3)
NEHA Member	35% (n=23)	25% (n=16)	29% (n=19)	11% (n=7)
ASTHO State Environmental Health Director	17% (n=4)	35% (n=8)	39% (n=9)	9% (n=2)
Other	35% (n=21)	27% (n=16)	23% (n=14)	15% (n=9)
Unaffiliated (no affiliation given)	42% (n=25)	28% (n=18)	17% (n=11)	14 (n=9)

*Note: some respondents indicated multiple memberships and may fall into more than one membership category, hence being double counted if compared across category.

Table 6 illustrates the awareness of the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Network by employer type.

Table 6. Awareness	Very little or no knowledge	Some knowledge	Fairly high knowledge	Very high knowledge
Local or County Govt.	58% (n=51)	19% (n=17)	17% (n=15)	6% (n=5)
State Govt.	27% (n=20)	27% (n=20)	29% (n=22)	17% (n=13)
Federal Govt.	25% (n=4)	63% (n=10)	13% (n=2)	--

University or College	25% (n=2)	--	25% (n=2)	50% (n=4)
Other (Public Sector assoc, Private Sector, non-profit etc.)	32% (n=6)	42% (n=8)	5% (n=1)	21% (n=4)

Table 7 illustrates the knowledge of the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Network among respondents who provided identifying information and are categorized according to their funding profile.

Table 7. Awareness	Funded	Unfunded	Unknown
Very little or no knowledge	34.0% (n=18)	40% (n=36)	46.0% (n=29)
Some knowledge	17.0% (n=9)	31.1% (n=28)	28.6% (n=18)
Fairly high knowledge	15.0% (n=8)	24.5% (n=22)	19.0% (n=12)
Very high knowledge	34.0% (n=18)	4.4% (n=4)	6.4% (n=4)

Value of the National Environmental Public Health Program and Network

Respondents were asked about the value in establishing the National Environmental Public Health Program and Network. 93 percent of respondents saw a value in creating a national network for human health, environmental exposure and environmental hazards data.

Table 8. Value in creating an EPHT Network	Number	Percent
Yes	190	93.0
No	2	1.0
Unsure at this time	13	6.0

Table 9 displays the responses considered by respondents as values in establishing a National Environmental Public Health Program and Network. The ability to link environmental and public health data and the ability to compare data at local, state, regional, and federal levels were identified as the most valued characteristics of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Network.

* Table 9. Value of the EPHT Program and Network	Number	Percent
Ability to link environmental and public health data	143	70.0
Ability to compare data at local, state, regional, and federal levels	122	60.0
Increased advocacy with decision makers about environmental health program needs	86	42.0
Availability of environmental and public health data in electronic format	70	34.0
Improved community education, empowerment, and mobilization	64	32.0
Increased data access	61	30.0
Improved data quality	58	29.0
Increased coordination	44	22.0
Increased response capability	43	21.0
Increased communications	40	20.0
Consolidated process for storing and accessing data	30	15.0
Do NOT see value in the Program or Network	2	1.0

*Respondents were instructed to check up to three options, thus percentages shown here add to greater than 100 percent

Resources

Participants were asked to indicate how they learned about the National EPHT Program or Network Web sites or publications of national organizations were the most indicated source for learning about the Program or Network. Table 10 displays these results.

*Table 10. Learning about the EPHT Program and Network	Number	Percent
Web sites or publications of national organizations (APHA, ASTHO, NACCHO, NEHA etc.)	74	36.0
CDC Website	57	28.0
Presentation at a national or state conference	57	28.0
Other (Colleagues from funded states, Pew Charitable Commission Trust Report etc.)	51	25.0
State or local Tracking Program meeting/conference call	41	20.0
State or local Tracking Program Web site(s)	34	17.0
Request for proposal in the Federal Registrar	31	15.0
Direct mailing/email from state or local Tracking Program	29	14.0
Have NOT heard of the program	20	10.0

*Respondents were instructed to check all that apply, thus percentages shown here add to greater than 100 percent.

Email newsletters, training/workshops and Web casts/conference calls were the most indicated methods for receiving future information on the development of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network. Table 11 displays these results.

*Table 11. Information on the EPHT Program and Network	Number	Percent
Email newsletter	112	55.0
Trainings/workshops	88	43.0
Webcasts/conference calls	82	40.0
Email listserv	81	40.0
Web-based interactive distance learning course	78	38.0
In-person meetings/conferences	75	37.0
Peer to peer assistance through NACCHO, NEHA and ASTHO	58	28.0
Information exchange	32	16.0
I would NOT like to receive information	3	3.0

*Respondents were instructed to check all that apply, thus percentages shown here add to greater than 100 percent.

Conclusions

Limitations

Due to the limited number of respondents, some information may need follow-up or further evaluation. Despite these factors, this assessment offers valuable insights into the awareness of the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program beyond those directly linked to the project.

Overall Trends

- 40 percent of respondents had very little or no knowledge of the Tracking Program and Network
- Many respondents from local or county governments (61.4 percent) had very little or no knowledge of the Tracking Program and Network.
- 34 percent of respondents from funded states (including local health agencies, private sector, etc.) indicated very little or no knowledge of the Tracking Program and Network.
- A majority of the respondents (70 percent) see a value in the ability to link environmental and public health data and the ability to compare data at local, state, regional, and federal levels (60 percent).
- 42 percent of respondents saw the EPHT Network as a means to increase advocacy with decision makers about environmental health program needs.
- 93 percent of respondents reported that a national network for human health, environmental exposure and environmental hazards data would be valuable.

According to the 2004 and 2005 EPHT surveys, 72 percent and 76 percent of respondents saw a value in creating a national network for human health, environmental exposure and environmental hazards data. In this 2007 assessment, 93 percent of respondents saw a value in creating a national network for human health, environmental exposure and environmental hazards. This assessment demonstrates support for the goals of the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Network among many respondents. Increased awareness may bring greater input and build stronger support for the continued development of the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Network. In order to ensure a comprehensive and representative effort, project partners should continue to involve all interested stakeholders in the development of the innovative Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Network.