

## **Background Description and Learning Experience**

Currently, Georgia has developed a health data repository for accessing, querying, analyzing, and mapping health outcomes. However, there is no environmental sampling data repository available for Georgia on OASIS or GSS. There is no tracking activities or other process in Georgia where environmental data collected by agencies and organizations is gathered and made accessible. GDPH is prepared and capable of conducting EPHT Network activities. We coordinate high-level statewide participation in program planning, implementation, community health education, professional training, and program evaluation with a variety of federal, state, and local government agencies, non-profit organizations, and universities. However, to get started, we need assistance, training, and guidance from CDC, ASTHO, and other states that conduct EPHT Network activities.

GDPH collaborated with federal and state partners to make measurable contributions to strengthen capacity for tracking activities in Georgia:

1. Attend National EPHT Workshop
2. Travel to a host-tracking state to learn about tracking activities
3. Participate in EPHT training
4. Coordinate interagency partnerships with state and federal data stewards
5. Pilot Project: provide a Georgia tracking information website with environmental and public health data links
6. Develop evaluation tool(s) using established methods to measure the success of the website

### *Background*

The Georgia Department of Community Health, Division of Public Health (GDPH), is the lead agency entrusted by the people of Georgia with the ultimate responsibility for the health of communities and the entire population. GDPH created the Chemical Hazardous Program in 1995 to conduct activities at hazardous waste sites that promote and protect the health of people in Georgia. The Chemical Hazards Program has expanded to include all health issues that arise regarding chemicals in the environment. Program professionals collaborate with local, state, and federal agencies, academia, organizations, policy makers, advocacy groups, the business community, and residents to inform and educate the public regarding environmental exposure pathways, related health effects, and exposure prevention.

GDPH offers the Online Analytical Statistical Information System (OASIS) on the agency's website. OASIS is a repository and suite of interactive tools used to access state public health standardized health data. OASIS and the repository are designed, built and maintained by the GDPH Office of Health Information and Policy (<http://oasis.state.ga.us>).

The data repository used by OASIS is currently populated with vital statistics (e.g., births, deaths, infant deaths), the Georgia Comprehensive Cancer Registry, hospital discharge data, emergency room visits, arboviral surveillance data, sexually transmitted disease data, and population data. OASIS also provides two risk behavior survey results (Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey).

OASIS plays an integral role in program planning, which includes determining target population areas, formulating financial plans, monitoring program effectiveness, program evaluation and reporting program outcomes. OASIS data querying tools are used to:

- Develop profiles and ‘report cards’ for counties and health districts,
- Assess community health needs, prioritize health problems, and evaluate programs,
- Assemble data for grant writing, health analysis, special projects or state legislative reporting,
- Examine data by census tract to identify high risk populations, and allocate resources, or
- Identify areas that contribute a disproportionate share of a health issue,
- Target problem areas to analyze specific health problems and outcomes,
- Create a basis for health communications or health advocacy,
- Apply GIS to analyze varied environmental risks focused on disease process, economic status and other environmental variables that influence health outcomes, and
- Map several geographic areas to compare varied health outcomes.

In addition to OASIS, The Georgia Statistics System (GSS) web site will customize the statistics, maps and graphs from the latest data sources from the Georgia County Guide. The Guide gives a county-by-county analysis with an access base of 1,600 variables including natural resources use, crime statistics, housing information, and health (i.e., disabilities, hospitals, physicians). The GSS also provides year-by-year analysis for selected variables for up to 50 years, for all counties and the state ([www.georgiastats.uga.edu/crosssection.html](http://www.georgiastats.uga.edu/crosssection.html)).

### **National Environmental Public Health Tracking Conference – April 2010**

From April 26 – 29, 2010, the Georgia Fellowship Principal Investigator attended the National EPHT meeting in New Orleans Louisiana to: review the progress of the state and national environmental public health tracking programs; review with CDC the progress on the national portal; discuss both the opportunities and challenges of having national data publicly available for both grantee and non-grantee states in the CDC public portal, and discuss the challenges of putting together the state and national environmental public health tracking programs. Plenaries and breakout sessions of most importance to helping Georgia to develop EPHT capacity were:

*Vision and Future Direction of the Network*  
*Q&A time for new Grantees*  
*Air Quality Health Impact Assessment – Methods for Tracking*  
*Data Stewards Partnership*  
*Pesticides (water)*  
*Geospatial Team*

In addition, the Principle Investigator found the Workshop to be an extremely positive and profound professional experience. The individuals assembled were passionate and creative and work as a team to overcome substantial challenges posed by developing and using state and national EPHT portals. The mission and goals of the National EPHT Network are consistent with those of GPDH. The philosophy, methods, achievements, and outcomes of the Network presented at the Workshop left the Georgia staff with a great deal of enthusiasm and a commitment to promote participation from Georgia public health and environmental agencies in future tracking activities.

### **Host State Site–Visit – May 2010**

From May 16 -19, 2010 the Georgia Fellowship Principal Investigator traveled to Olympia, Washington to meet with host state staff. Fellows and currently funded EPHT Network states are matched by ASTHO based on how closely Fellow’s proposals and tracking interests complement current tracking activities at host

states. ASTHO determined that Georgia's interest in relating health data and reports with water quality and fish consumption data best match those of Washington. The visit was well planned by the Washington Environmental Public Health Tracking Program, Various presentations were made by Washington EPHT staff and their collaborators (see Meeting Agenda—Appendix A).

Highlights of the host site visit included an intensive demonstration of Washington State's EPHT portal structure, informatics, and content.

### **Interagency Partnership Coordination**

On May 26, 2010 GDPH hosted the first interagency meeting to coordinate state and federal partners that collect, maintain, and analyze environmental and public health data. The goal of the meeting was to introduce the EPHT Network, and encourage participation and feedback from partners. Since the meeting, communication between GDPH and other agency staff and data stewards has continued:

- The University of Georgia contacted GDPH offering assistance with preparing a National EPHT Network funding proposal, having experience from helping South Carolina.
- Directors in the GDPH Office of Health Information and Policy and Epidemiology Branch are prepared to present EPHT to GDPH Management for agency wide support.
- The Georgia Environmental Protection Division began collaborating with GDPH on a statewide arsenic in groundwater investigation comparing elevated naturally-occurring arsenic levels and dermal symptoms (hospital discharge data) for populations in southern Georgia (Appendix D).
- The Georgia Department of Community Affairs is working with GDPH to promote radon testing in northern Georgia using GIS maps of radon test results, home age, socioeconomic status, smoking and lung cancer rates.

### **Georgia State and Federal Partners**

#### *Georgia Environmental Protection Division*

Air Protection Land Protection Watershed Protection Hazardous Sites Response  
Fish Consumption Guidelines Georgia Geological Survey

#### *Georgia Department of Community Affairs*

Radon Education

#### *University of Georgia*

Cooperative Extension Service

#### *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*

Superfund  
Air Quality  
Water Protection

#### *Georgia Division of Public Health*

Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Environmental Epidemiology Well Water  
Quality Health Information and Policy

### **Planned Activities**

The ASTHO Fellowship helped us build capacity to conduct tracking activities. In the future, GDPH staff will work with existing tracking states to continue building capacity for Georgia, and to promote

and collaborate with partners to explore conducting EPHT activities:

- Portal development and standards
- Nationally Consistent Data and Measures (NCDMs)
- Creating Metadata and Tracking Metadata Creation Tool
- Risk communication –addressing community concerns

## **Pilot Project**

With the help of our partners listed above and others, GDPH gathered and organized existing environmental data sources and reports for Georgia from various local, state and federal agencies, and developed descriptive links to these data resources for inclusion on our agency website (Appendix E). To help develop our website, we researched the Washington tracking portal to learn about design, methods, and resources. We developed an outline of the Washington tracking portal, which can be found in Appendix B.

GDPH now provides national and state tracking information and data links in web pages on the Chemical Hazards Program website ([health.state.ga/programs/hazards/tracking](http://health.state.ga/programs/hazards/tracking)). Included on the web pages are links to CDCs EPHT Network website and ASTHO's tracking website. The website continues to be expanded to include a glossary, and maps and other graphics that illustrate EPHT terms and concepts. The website will also include ASTHO's Environmental Health Strategic Map for the Built and Synthetic Environments: land use and planning, healthy housing, indoor environments, toxics, air pollution, and radiation.

## **Conclusion**

Participation in Association of State and Territorial Health Officials *State-to-State Peer Fellowship Program* was a great success for GDPH and the people of Georgia. As an unfunded state, the GDPH will track key indicators as described by CDC. This will include hospitalizations for lung cancer (northern Georgia) and dermal symptoms (southern Georgia) and data on radon testing results and key water contaminants as defined through interagency partner meetings.

Project Outcomes Summarized:

1. Learned about the National EPHT Network and Washington EPHT Program
2. Communicated with existing portal states for guidance and ideas
3. Educated GDPH staff and other state and federal agency staff in Georgia about the EPHT Network
4. Strengthened existing partnerships and developed new partnerships
5. Identified and gathered state-specific environmental data resources, and provide these resources for inclusion in OASIS
6. Conducted Pilot Project: provided an introduction of the services the EPHT and the National Network can provide to our clients