

DRAFT

December 8, 2003

Paul English, Ph.D., MPH
Environmental Health Investigations Branch
California Department of Health Services
1515 Clay Street, Suite 1700
Oakland, Ca. 94612

Dear Dr. English:

On behalf of the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health (CCDEH), I offer our support of the Draft Report prepared by the SB702 Expert Working Group. We are very pleased that the Working Group includes nationally recognized experts from a range of public and environmental disciplines. The findings and recommendations appear sound and give us opportunities to develop prevention strategies and precautionary approaches to protect public health and the environment.

The following comments are gathered from our local environmental health jurisdictions:

1. For this tracking system to be useful for all stakeholders, state agencies, mainly CDHS and CalEPA have to work together and provide leadership in establishing this system. The agencies must treat this as a priority and commit resources to implement the recommendations of the Report. We support the creation of an Office of Environmental Health Tracking (OEHT) and are willing to serve on the OEHT Advisory Committee.
2. The Report stresses chemical exposures to the exclusion of microbiological hazards. Surveillance systems for foodborne and waterborne illnesses, arboviruses, Lyme Disease, Hantaviruses and so forth are no less important
3. A standardized approach is essential to ensure good data quality, but will not be possible without significant long-term expenditures for technology and labor. Because we cannot expect short-term immediately measurable health improvements from this project, it is highly vulnerable to defunding. Adequate long-term funding sources must be identified and protected.
4. The Report contains useful information for local environmental and public health departments embarking on initiatives related to environmental justice or the linkage of environmental pollution with public health.
5. Improving hazard and health outcomes tracking is likely to prove useful in evaluating the local public and environmental health programs and activities.

Providing public access to environmental health information will allow them to make informed decisions.

6. It should be acknowledged that State and local health authorities must collaborate in monitoring health disparities in order to improve public policies.
7. State needs to assist communities and community groups to access environmental health data and to address issues of environmental justice, it also needs to play a leadership role in promoting these same values among local agencies, who often need help with issue awareness as well as information access and interpretation.

We offer our assistance to you in your efforts to develop this surveillance system. The CCDEH directors and our 2,000 environmental health specialists are working with the local communities and businesses to protect the public health, safety and the environment. A lot of information and data are collected and available for sharing with the public, various agencies and organizations. CCDEH should play an important role in the implementation of the recommendations in the Final Report of the Working Group

We hope that these comments are useful to you and look forward to the Final Report.. Please let me know if there is anything further that we should address.

Sincerely,

Jon Morgan
President, CCDEH

cc. CCDEH Executive Committee
Mee Ling Tung, Director, Alameda County Environmental Health