

# CALIFORNIA TRACKING

The Newsletter of the California  
Environmental Health Tracking Program

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[www.catracking.com](http://www.catracking.com)



## IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, we examine environmental health tracking in relation to the overall scope of public health.

Tracking plays a key role in the overall scheme because it falls within the first function of public health: assessment. This function is crucial because it yields information that facilitates, guides, and often drives other public health activities such as development, enforcement, and evaluation of policies, program, and services.

In the end, tracking shares the same vision of public health: healthy people in healthy communities. Therefore, CEHTP is examining issues related to linking tracking to the other functions and services of public health.

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## Putting it in perspective :: where does environmental health tracking fit in the bigger picture of public health?

### What is Public Health?

Public health is defined as organized community efforts aimed at achieving healthy people in healthy communities. These organized efforts are undertaken by public and private organizations, health and environmental professionals, and community leaders and members. The mission of public health is to promote physical and mental health and prevent disease, injury, and disability. Public health is made up of three core functions:

- ◆ Assessing and monitoring the health of communities and the contributing factors of health;
- ◆ Formulating public policies, in collaboration with community and government leaders, to address health problems and priorities;
- ◆ Assuring that all populations have access to appropriate and effective health care, health promotion, and disease prevention services, and evaluating the effectiveness of those services.

The core functions can further be broken down into 10 essential services of public health (Figure 1). See details and examples of the 10 essential services at: [www.apha.org/ppp/science/10ES.htm](http://www.apha.org/ppp/science/10ES.htm)

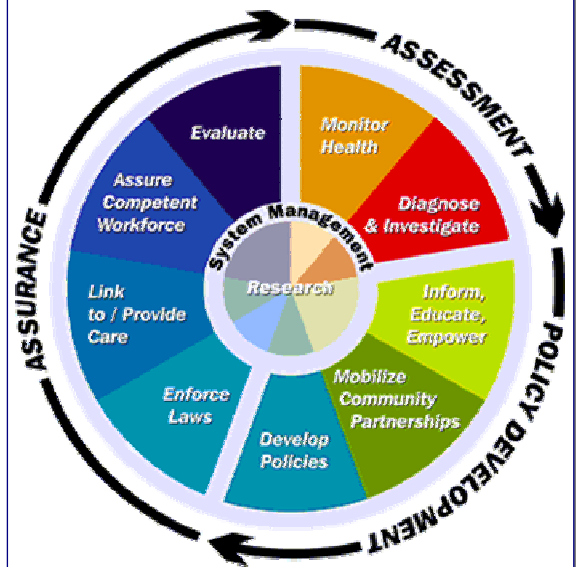
### Where does environmental health tracking fit in the scope of public health?

Environmental health tracking is the surveillance (ongoing and systematic data collection, integration, analysis, and interpretation) of environmentally related diseases and exposure to environmental hazards. Strictly speaking, tracking falls within the first function of public health: assessing health and risk factors. It is meant to monitor, diagnose, and describe the health and the environment of communities. In and of itself, tracking is not an intervention. Rather, it enables action and change by generating information from good data and making that information available to partners who carry out the mission of public health. Therefore, environmental health tracking is only as good as the public health functions and services that follow as a result of the information.

"...many public health activities are invisible – you do not see them, but you see their results throughout the day... all of us use the public health system daily, whether we know it or not. We get up in the morning, turn on the faucet, and know that our water is safe. That is public health – that is the result of public health. We sit down at the breakfast table and eat a more nutritious breakfast, and there are even "Nutrition Facts" on the cereal box. That, too is public health. We get into our cars (or, better yet, onto our bicycles) to go to work or school or elsewhere, and those cars are less polluting and safer, with air bags, seat belts, child restraints... All of that is public health. And when we get to work, even though our workplaces still have many hazards, they are much safer today than ever before and much safer than those in many other countries. That, too, is public health."

*Dr. Barry Levy, Past President of the American Public Health Association*

FIGURE 1: Core Functions and 10 Essential Services of Public Health



*Public Health Functions Steering Committee,  
Public Health in America, Fall 1994.*

*continued on page 2*

**Why is the assessment function of public health so important?**

Simply put, good decisions should be based on good information. The assessment function of public health helps describe the conditions of the community, identify problems and opportunities, and trigger meaningful questions.

Having a more complete and ongoing picture of communities also helps to answer whether programs or policies are working. In other words, the first function of public health, assessment, yields information that facilitates, guides, and often drives every other public health function.

**Are there examples of surveillance data informing various public health functions?**

There are many cases of good information driving public health policies and facilitating successes.

For example, over the past 50 years, there have been dramatic improvements in death and injury from car accidents. The collective and systematic approach to motor-vehicle and highway safety began with the recognition that accident data could be employed in public health policies and interventions.

With good data, public health officials were able to identify key factors related to car crashes. Armed with this information, massive, ongoing, and coordinated efforts were made to educate, regulate, enforce, and engineer for safety. Because there have been, and continues to be, tremendous efforts to collect, analyze, and share data, Americans are safer than ever in automobiles.

Other prominent examples of public health achievements spurred by good information include prevention and control of infectious diseases and tobacco use.

Good information also facilitates accountability, appraisal, and validation through program and policy evaluation. A classic example of how good information supports evaluation of public policy is the tracking of levels of lead in blood. As shown in Figure 2, data proved that policies that phased out lead in gasoline not only reduced the levels of lead in people but also did it much more successfully than predicted.

**What about the other functions and services of public health?**

Public health by no means stops at the identification and assessment of

problems and conditions. In fact, it begins there. Information gathered from this step is used as a launching point for public health activities, initiatives, and policies. The other functions and services are certainly the action-oriented parts of public health and the parts that bring about positive change in communities.

Unfortunately there is often a gap between the assessment function of public health and the policy and assurance functions. This gap is often the result of: 1) lack of reliable and meaningful information; 2) failure to communicate information to those who need to know; and/or 3) diminished capacity among those who need to take action.

**What is CEHTP doing to close the gap between information and action?**

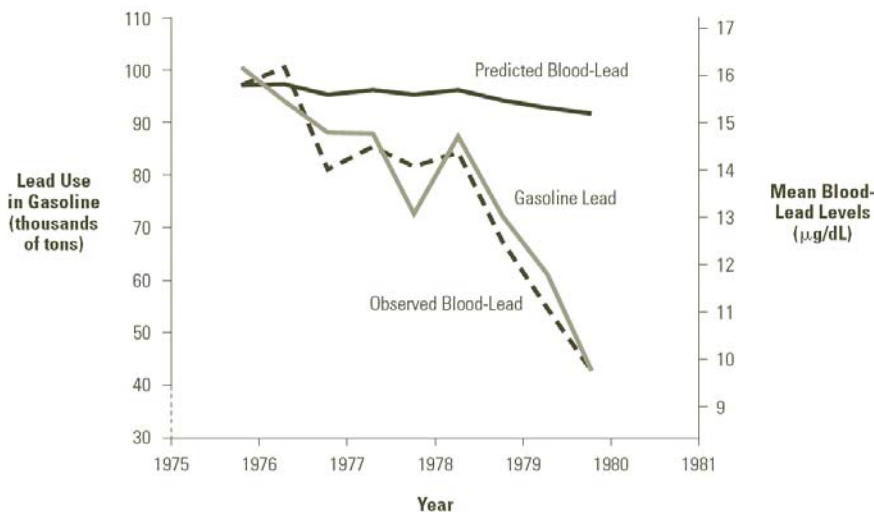
Through various program initiatives CEHTP is taking steps to better understand how to interpret and communicate data on health and the environment to various audiences. Furthermore, CEHTP is assessing organizational and community barriers and capacities in accessing, understanding, analyzing, and utilizing data for public health functions. (See top of page 3)

While the establishment of an environmental health tracking system may be several years away, CEHTP is beginning to examine strategies for increasing stakeholders' readiness to take full advantage of this future resource and become stronger partners in achieving healthy people in healthy communities.

**Related public health information and resources:**

- [www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=300](http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=300)
- [www.ncsl.org/programs/health/public\\_health.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/health/public_health.htm)
- [www.phf.org/infrastructure/index.php](http://www.phf.org/infrastructure/index.php)
- [www.health.gov/phfunctions/](http://www.health.gov/phfunctions/)
- [www.trainingfinder.org/competencies](http://www.trainingfinder.org/competencies) ❖

**FIGURE 2: Predicted and Actual Declines in Blood-Lead Levels**



Source: **Strategies for Establishing an Environmental Health Surveillance System in California: A Report of the SB702 Expert Working Group**

## CEHTP Mini-Grants to support local environmental health capacity building

Central to a comprehensive plan for the future environmental health tracking system in California are strategies to ensure that: 1) information generated by a tracking system is communicated to communities, local public agencies, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders in the most effective methods and formats; and 2) stakeholder capacities to access, understand, analyze, and utilize the information is developed.

To those ends, the California Environmental Health Tracking Program (CEHTP) is seeking applications from local public health agencies and community-based non-profit organizations for local capacity building mini-grants.

The purpose of the grants are to support projects that build or demonstrate community and/or organizational capacities in accessing, understanding, analyzing, or utilizing data on environmental hazards/exposures and environmentally related diseases for public health functions. These are few of the capacities that could help stakeholders to take advantage of a future statewide environmental health tracking system and become stronger partners in protecting and improving the health of all Californians.

CEHTP will award 3-4 mini-grants at approximately \$5000-\$10,000 each with an expected duration of 6 months.

**Two categories of grants are available: (each is a separate grant)**

**A) Capacity Building Workshop Grant:** to support projects that increase organizational and/or community capacity through a targeted workshop. The workshop must address at least one of the main capacities below:

- ◆ Accessing, acquiring, understanding, managing, analyzing, and interpreting data on environmental hazards/exposures and environmentally related diseases.
- ◆ Utilizing data for public health functions such as public education and outreach; community organizing/mobilizing; program planning/development; public policy development; program evaluation; risk communication; community environmental health assessments; environmental justice; and community-based participatory research.

**B) Capacity Demonstration Grant:** to support projects that demonstrate community and/or organizational capacity in accessing, understanding, analyzing, and utilizing data for action. Projects under this grant must utilize environmental health data to perform or facilitate public health functions (such as public education and outreach; community organizing/mobilizing; program planning and evaluation; public policy development; risk communication; community environmental health assessments; environmental justice; or community-based participatory research).

Through these grants (along with other program initiatives), CEHTP hopes to continue building local capacity, applying results to long-term planning, and better understanding how to interpret and communicate environmental health data and information.

For more information about the mini-grants or to download the complete Request for Applications, visit [www.catracking.com/grant](http://www.catracking.com/grant).

## Biomonitoring Community Forum

“Critical Issues in Biomonitoring” a Bay Area community forum, will bring together environmental health and breast cancer advocates, academic and community-based researchers, public health professionals, public policy leaders, health educators, ethicists and community members to facilitate a dialogue on important issues relevant to biomonitoring.

The goals of the forum are to:

1. Inform and educate participants from a variety of perspectives on the risks and benefits of biomonitoring.
2. Facilitate an interactive exchange of information and concerns related to biomonitoring among participants.
3. Identify opportunities for participants to engage in future decision making activities related to biomonitoring.
4. Identify partnerships interested in collaborating in future community based, participatory research studies using biomonitoring.
5. Develop recommendations and next steps on identified areas of interest and concern related to biomonitoring.

Space at the forum is limited and early registration is encouraged. For more information, visit: [www.breastcancerwatch.org](http://www.breastcancerwatch.org).

### Critical Issues in Biomonitoring: a Community Forum

October 9, 2004

UCSF Mission Bay Campus  
San Francisco, CA 94107

#### Sponsored by:

- **Marin Breast Cancer Watch**

#### Co-Sponsored by:

- Marin County Department of Health and Human Services
- The Bay Area Breast Cancer and Environment Research Center
- California Environmental Health Tracking Program

## Announcement :: Community Health Assessment Conference – September 28-30, Atlanta

The purpose of this conference is to share information on innovative systems and methods that improve the way data are used to inform public health programs, services, and policy at the state and local level. The conference is being sponsored by the CDC Assessment Initiative and the National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems (NAPHSIS) Leadership Institute.

Who should attend? Staff from state and local health departments, federal agencies, and community organizations involved or interested in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data for community health assessment.

Below are few of the sessions planned for the conference:

- ◆ Effective communication of data for decision-making and action.
- ◆ Building public health workforce skills in data use and interpretation.
- ◆ What makes community health assessments useful?
- ◆ Success stories: moving from assessment to intervention.
- ◆ Integrating GIS with health data: from the internet to the neighborhood.
- ◆ Generating data for county and sub county populations.

For more information, visit

[www.cdc.gov/epo/dphsi/AI/conference/2004/registration.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/epo/dphsi/AI/conference/2004/registration.htm).

*Disclaimer: Links to non-CEHTP resources are provided solely as a service. These links do not constitute an endorsement of these resources and none should be inferred. CEHTP is not responsible for the content of the individual organization web pages or documents found at these links.*


### CALIFORNIA TRACKING :: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM

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The California Environmental Health Tracking Program (CEHTP) is a collaborative initiative of the Division of Environmental and Occupational Disease Control of the California Department of Health Services (CDHS-DEODC), the Office of Environmental Health Hazards Assessment of the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA-OEHHA), and the University of California and is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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