

MONTANA PUBLIC HEALTH IN ACTION



Environmental Public Health Tracking Project



Why Environmental Public Health Tracking Is Important

The importance of tracking chronic diseases and determining their relationship to environmental factors was recognized by both the Montana House and Senate through the bipartisan support given to Montana HB 582. This bill, signed into law in March 2001, mandated a feasibility study. The study recommended establishing an Environmental Public Health Tracking System.

- ❖ Well-known associations exist between exposure to some environmental hazards such as asbestos, mercury, lead, arsenic and radon, and health effects such as cancer, lung disease, and birth defects.
- ❖ There is a gap in our knowledge regarding the interrelationship between disease trends and environmental factors in Montana.
- ❖ Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) is a new national initiative. Montana's EPHT program is a collaborative effort between the Department of Public Health and Human Services and the Department of Environmental Quality. The purpose is to determine environmental health priorities and join existing environmental data with health information.
- ❖ Chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer and stroke, are the leading causes of death in Montana and cost Montanans an estimated \$2.8 billion per year.

What Has Been Accomplished

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) awarded Montana a 3-year planning grant for EPHT in September 2002. Since receiving this funding the following planning steps have been accomplished:

- ◆ The Environmental Public Health Tracking Advisory Group, consisting of partners across the state, has met quarterly since April 2003, providing input and recommendations.
- ◆ Eleven county and tribal public health departments have initiated Environmental Health Assessments to determine their constituents' top environmental health concerns. These assessments were completed in September of 2004.
- ◆ Top environmental health concerns of local environmental and health department staff, county commissioners, and environmental advocacy groups have been solicited. The results of this survey are available.
- ◆ Inventories of existing environmental and public health databases are underway and will be completed by December 2004.
- ◆ A model for an integrated database network system has been designed.
- ◆ The University of Montana has examined associations between air quality, respiratory disease, and cardiovascular disease in a 3-county area as a pilot data linking project.

Next Steps

- ⇒ 2005. Develop a strategic plan for joining and improving Montana's health and environmental data. This plan will be written with the assistance of the EPHT Advisory Group so as to include interagency and other stakeholder input.
- ⇒ 2005. Determine gaps in the data that is currently collected. For example, Montana is one of the few states in which the Health Department does not have access to hospital discharge information.
- ⇒ 2004-2005. Conduct other pilot projects to investigate the relationship between health effects and environmental hazards in Montana.
- ⇒ Continue to work collaboratively with other public health programs and environmental agencies to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance existing State systems.
- ⇒ September 2005. Apply for implementation funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to continue the program.

For more information, contact:

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