CSG Partner Profile

The Council of State Governments partners with other organizations to deliver services and information to states. In 2004, CSG entered into a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The goal of this cooperative, named Healthy States, is to provide state leaders with access to information they need to make sound decisions about public health issues. The following CSG Partner Profile provides a snapshot of the range of services our partners at CDC provide to states.

Environmental Public Health

Protecting the public’s health from environmental hazards
by Ann Kelly

There is strong public concern that hazards in the environment are harming health. For example, communities are concerned about the health effects of hazardous waste sites. They are also concerned about environmental causes of diseases such as autism, asthma, and cancer. Those are concerns of individuals, but businesses, schools, and other institutions are also worried.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention helps states, communities, and cities protect the public from environmental health threats through its National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). These agencies share the goal of protecting public health by identifying environmental threats to health and promoting a healthful relationship between people and their environment. They accomplish this by:
1. conducting or assisting investigations of exposure to environmental hazards and the resulting health effects from exposure;
2. measuring or predicting how many people are exposed to the hazards and what health effects are experienced; and
3. using this information on environmental hazards, human exposure and health effects to plan, target, conduct and evaluate actions to protect health.

CDC develops partnerships to accomplish these functions with federal, state and local environmental and public health agencies, as well as tribes and territories, national organizations, academic institutions, business and industry, and community organizations. CDC also provides resources for these partners, including funding, training, technical assistance, tools and methods and educational information for various audiences. Whether the threat involves a massive exposure of children to lead at a nearby smelting site or analyzing a single child’s blood sample for lead content, CDC’s environmental public health scientists work in partnership with national, state, county and city public health organizations to address environmental health threats.

National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH)

The NCEH programs prevent and control diseases, birth defects, disabilities and deaths from interactions between people and their environmental causes. NCEH’s programs include:
• supporting states and tribes in preparing for and responding to emergencies (1) related to natural disasters, including extreme heat and cold, (2) involving chemicals and (3) involving radiological or nuclear devices and materials;
• investigating effects of environmental hazard exposure and advising states how to protect health, for example investigating causes and effects of harmful algal blooms in lakes, strange rashes in school children and deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning after extreme weather events;
• conducting laboratory studies to assess the U.S. population’s exposure to environmental chemicals using biomonitoring, which measures hundreds of chemicals in the human body. A National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals is published every two years, which is used by scientists, state and local public health officials and physicians to help prevent diseases resulting from exposure to environmental chemicals;
• improving laboratory methods to diagnose and prevent disease, and ensuring that certified laboratories meet national standards for tests such as newborn screening tests, blood lead levels and lipid levels;
• leading national programs with state agencies and private organizations participating in control asthma, prevent lead poisoning and assure sanitary conditions on cruise ships for travelers and crew members;
• encouraging states and private organizations to build a national network of linked data on environmental hazards, human exposures and health effects, so that consistent, comparable information will be available to plan, apply and evaluate actions to prevent illness from environmental hazards; and
• working internationally to investigate environmental health issues on the U.S.-Mexico border, responding to emergencies such as the 2004 tsunami and an aflatoxin outbreak in Kenya and responding to complex humanitarian emergencies such as the war in Afghanistan.

For more information on NCEH, please visit www.cdc.gov/nc eh.

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)

ATSDR addresses environmental public health threats associated with hazardous waste sites. Public health assessments, consultations and health studies at and near hazardous waste sites are conducted, working closely with the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state and local public health organizations. ATSDR programs help states and communities cope with the health threats of environmental toxins through:

• intense responses such as assessing public exposure to asbestos fibers in local communities;
• continuous activities such as sponsoring pediatric environmental health specialty units at academic medical centers around the country;

• ongoing functions such as developing toxicological profiles of hazardous substances, offering medical management guidelines to those treating patients exposed to hazardous substances and providing reliable health information to communities affected by hazardous waste sites; and

• direct support providing grant funding, expertise and consultation to 29 state public health agencies’ staff to train local health professionals on responses to hazardous waste site exposures and contamination.

For more information on ATSDR, please visit www.atsdr.cdc.gov.

Emergency Preparedness

NCEH and ATSDR also work together with states and cities to improve their capacity to respond to emergency events that pose a public health threat, including terrorism. In particular, the state-of-the-art environmental public health laboratory works closely with states and cities to conduct biomonitoring for assessing human exposure to chemicals and to improve laboratory methods to diagnose and treat selected diseases that may result from an emergency event.

For more information on emergency preparedness and response information from these and other CDC agencies, please visit www.bt.cdc.gov.

Conclusion

CDC’s environmental public health agencies, NCEH and ATSDR, bring resources at all levels to help states, communities and cities protect the public from environmental threats to health. CDC and CSG look forward to providing state officials with the information they need as policymakers to protect their constituents from environmental hazards.

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For more information on the environmental public health projects in your state, please visit the state fact sheet at www.cdc.gov/nc eh/publications/jacsheets.htm.

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