

## Direct from CDC's Environmental Health Services Branch

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# Helping Environmental Health Practitioners Develop Strategic Partnerships and Engage Public Health Policy Makers on the Value and Benefits of Environmental Health Services

*Editor's note: NEHA strives to provide up-to-date and relevant information on environmental health and to build partnerships in the profession. In pursuit of these goals, we will feature a column from the Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in every issue of the Journal.*

*EHSB's objective is to strengthen the role of state, local, and national environmental health programs and professionals to anticipate, identify, and respond to adverse environmental exposures and the consequences of these exposures for human health. The services being developed through EHSB include access to topical, relevant, and scientific information; consultation; and assistance to environmental health specialists, sanitarians, and environmental health professionals and practitioners.*

*EHSB appreciates NEHA's invitation to provide monthly columns for the Journal. EHSB staff will be highlighting a variety of concerns, opportunities, challenges, and successes that we all share in environmental public health.*

**T**his month, the Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB) is celebrating the accomplishments of its grantees in the area of capacity building for environmental public health. In addition to understanding the activities and achieving the outcomes featured this month in the *Journal of Environmental Health*, the grantees felt the need to address another issue that affects the ability of a program to improve environmental health service delivery—strategic partnerships with policy makers. As a result, a small grantee workgroup developed a set of talking points that environmental public health practitioners can use to facilitate their discussions with public health policy makers on the value and benefits of environmental health services. Workgroup members represented a cross-section of the environmental public health workforce: They were from state or local government agencies and academia, the length of their experience ranged from less than 10 years to more than 30 years, and they came from different geographic regions.

The workgroup came up with a set of criteria to guide the development of the talking points:

- illustrate the importance of environmental public health programs to the overall health and welfare of the nation;
- reinforce the point that the 10 essential services (see the first sidebar on page 67) are important elements in the building or enhancing of environmental public health program infrastructure;
- recognize the critical role that public policy makers play in supporting the delivery of environmental public health services;

- suggest that environmental public health practitioners form and sustain strategic partners with policy makers; and
- support increased capacity in environmental health to reduce environmental risk, train a competent workforce (for a list of core competencies, see the second sidebar on page 67), and effectively deliver environmental public health services.

The talking points hinge on three simple questions that the group believes most practitioners have asked themselves in their effort to address demand for their services while available resources have remained constant or have declined:

- What kinds of health risks do environmental public health services address?
- What can policy makers do?
- What can local environmental public health practitioners do?

The workgroup members called on their own experiences in order to address and provide anecdotal responses to each question. These responses, which can be found at [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Docs/Value\\_and\\_Benefits\\_of\\_EH\\_Services.doc](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Docs/Value_and_Benefits_of_EH_Services.doc), are the talking points. The talking points are a beginning: a set of answers that practitioners can customize as necessary to keep the message the same across the country yet be community-specific—one voice for environmental public health. Practitioners are encouraged to use these questions and answers in ways that are relevant to their communities or regions.

Please take a minute to review the talking points and send us your comments. You can send comments by visiting the Web address

given above and clicking on the comments link. Please tell us if the talking points are relevant and beneficial in your efforts to engage policy makers and develop strategic partnerships. 🐼

**Acknowledgement:** Members of the work-group that developed the talking points document were Tom Struzick, M.S.W./M.Ed., University of Alabama at Birmingham; Ken Sharp, R.E.H.S., Iowa Department of Public Health; Carl Osaki, R.S., M.S.P.H., University of Washington; Lynn Schulman George, Multnomah County Environmental Health; Sarah Kotchian, Ed.M., M.P.H., Ph.D., University of New Mexico; and Daneen Farrow Collier, M.S.P.H., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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### The 10 Essential Services of Environmental Public Health

- Monitor environmental and health status to identify community environmental health problems.
- Diagnose and investigate environmental health problems and health hazards in the community.
- Inform, educate, and empower people about environmental health issues.
- Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve environmental health problems.
- Develop policies and plans that support individual and community environmental health efforts.
- Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety.
- Link people to needed environmental health services and assure the provision of environmental health services when otherwise unavailable.
- Assure a competent environmental health and personal health care workforce.
- Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based environmental health services.
- Conduct research for new insights and innovative solutions to environmental health problems and issues.

### Core Competencies of Environmental Public Health

#### Assessment

1. Information gathering
2. Data analysis and interpretation
3. Evaluation

#### Management

1. Problem solving
2. Economic and political issues
3. Organizational knowledge and behavior
4. Project management
5. Computer and information technology
6. Reporting, documentation, and record keeping
7. Collaboration

#### Communication

1. Educate
2. Communicate
3. Conflict resolution
4. Marketing

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