

Direct from CDC's Environmental Health Services Branch

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Environmental Public Health Leadership Revisited

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.

The Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute (EPHLI) was established in 2004 by the Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB), with the participation of the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), the Louisville Metropolitan Health Department, and the National Public Health Leadership Development Network. EPHLI has trained 113 environmental health practitioners from federal, state, and local environmental and public health organizations to envision and develop problem-solving strategies that address emerging environmental health issues (see www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ephli/fellows_mentors.htm).

EPHLI trains future leaders to tackle the looming challenges often faced by environmental public health programs:

- public indifference,
- ill-prepared workforce,
- scarce resources,
- fragmented environmental public health service delivery systems, and
- poor understanding of the role of environmental health.

Institute fellows attend four one-week training sessions in which they

- enhance their skills at building teams and forming innovative partnerships,
- develop and improve approaches to resolving conflict, and
- learn about common organizational archetypes that reveal leverage points for solving problems with the greatest impact.

Each fellow is assigned to a team and a team mentor, who together facilitate the development of an action learning environment. Fel-

lows work collaboratively with team members to develop successful problem-solving strategies. The focal point of the fellow's experience is the development of a leadership project that is germane to the fellow, the organization where he or she works, and the practice of environmental public health (see www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ephli/keywords.htm). The fellows incorporate new tools and problem-solving strategies into their leadership projects as they progress through the institute.

Institute applicants can work on either individual or group projects (see www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ephli/projects.htm). Since 2005, 10 groups have been selected to participate. One team of environmental health practitioners from Oklahoma provided a great example of building collaboration within a state to address the fragmentation of environmental public health services (see www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ephli/Reports/TeamOklahoma.doc). The five team members built on each individual's experience from different agencies to increase the coordination of environmental public health services delivered in four counties in southeast Oklahoma. The team fostered collaboration among the Oklahoma State Department of Health, the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, and the Indian Health Services so that the counties served could have a clearer understanding of the role of environmental health services in the region.

Most EPHLI fellows focus on individual projects—which have been as diverse as the regions and agencies they represent. Several fellows have developed projects addressing new and emerging threats associated with

toxic exposures in housing contaminated by clandestine methamphetamine laboratories (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ephli/keywords.htm#Methamphetamine_Lab_Cleanup). Other fellows have provided the leadership to initiate new programs for traditional environmental health services, such as the development of a safe-drinking-water program for private individual water wells (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ephli/keywords.htm#Safe_Drinking_Water).

Is EPHLI meeting the critical need for new environmental public health leaders? The success of the institute is demonstrated not only by the innovative approaches taken to resolve complex issues or by the perseverance of champions in promoting change. Fellows also have reported substantial growth, both personal and professional, as a result of their participation:

- “EPHLI exceeded my expectations in areas I did not anticipate, particularly in the area of personal growth.”—*Connie Mendel, Louisville Metro Health Department*
- “Being a part of this leadership institute has been a tremendous catalyst for my personal and professional growth.... The use of self-assessments, particularly the

Skillscope 360, was invaluable.”—*Dawn Marie Prandi, Somerset County Department of Health*

EPHLI emphasizes the importance of developing creative vision in an organization. The institute has taught fellows how to be advocates for a shared vision that inspires new enthusiasm:

- “EPHLI has strengthened my dedication to making a difference in environmental health. EPHLI gave me the chance to gain more context knowledge and help me immediately apply new ideas and concepts to my normal day-to-day tasks.”—*Jessica Shelly, Cincinnati Public Schools*
- “Systems thinking provided an organized framework and methodological structure for my thought processes allowing me to constructively identify workplace systems, the underlying forces that influence those systems, and how to make minor adjustments to the systems to correct problems and improve results.”—*David Plumyers, Wisconsin Division of Public Health*

- “EPHLI has taught me how to think differently about solutions and challenges, looking at causality and root problems instead of reaction-based activities and the status quo.”—*Jefferson Ketchel, Public Health—Seattle and King County*

EPHLI is enhancing the leadership capabilities of environmental public health service providers to prepare and direct a competent workforce that can perform the 10 essential environmental public health services (see www.phppo.cdc.gov/owpp/docs/library/1994/Public%20Health%20Functions.PDF). New applications, for EPHLI Cohort IV (class of 2008–2009), are being accepted until the end of October 2007. Information about applications is posted at www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EPHLI. 🐼

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ACCREDITED EH SCIENCE AND PROTECTION PROGRAMS

The following colleges and universities offer accredited environmental health programs for undergraduate and graduate degrees (where indicated). For more information, please contact the schools directly, visit the National Environmental Health Science and Protection Accreditation Council (EHAC) Web site at www.ehacoffice.org, or contact EHAC at ehacinfo@aehap.org or at (503) 235-6047.

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CSU Northridge also has an accredited graduate program.

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ECU also has an accredited graduate program.

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ETSU also has an accredited graduate program.

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