

MINNESOTA

Keeping Track, Promoting Health



For decades, the United States has faced a fundamental gap in understanding how environmental contaminants affect people's health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working to close this gap by improving surveillance through the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network). The Tracking Network is a dynamic Web-based tool that, for the first time, provides health and environment data in one easy to find location.

Policy makers and public health officials can use the Tracking Network to make critical decisions about where to target environmental public health resources and interventions. Health practitioners and researchers can use the Tracking Network to learn more about health conditions related to the environment, and improve treatment plans. Anyone can use the Tracking Network to find out how the environment may be affecting them, their family's or community's health.

The building blocks of the national network are state and local health departments around the country that are funded to build local tracking systems. These systems supply data to the National Tracking Network and address local environmental public health concerns. The tracking programs use their networks every day to improve the health of their communities.

"CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network is the most important accomplishment of the past decade."

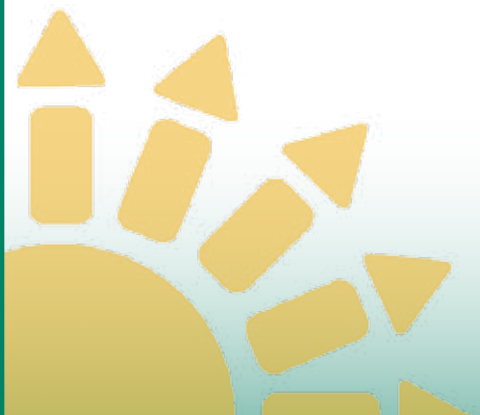
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Why Tracking Matters in Minnesota

From the Iron Range in the northeast to the Twin Cities to the farmlands of southern Minnesota, every community in Minnesota has environmental health issues. Environmental public health tracking gathers data about both the environment and health into a Web site. The data help environmental health experts determine if people have been exposed to chemicals in the environment. Public health agencies can use the data to educate citizens and inform policy makers about environmental health risks.

In 2007, state law created the Minnesota Environmental Health Tracking and Biomonitoring program. Biomonitoring gathers information about the chemicals people have been exposed to and the amounts of those chemicals in their bodies. In 2009, the Minnesota began receiving funding from CDC to create a statewide Environmental Public Health Tracking Network as part of the National Tracking Network. Minnesota's tracking program is using the funding to help state and local programs work together to develop data and measurements similar to tracking data across the nation. In 2011, Minnesota launched their network which makes environmental hazards and health effect data available to the public.



National Center for Environmental Health
Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects



TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
<p>Tracking the impact of a statewide carbon monoxide (CO) alarm law</p>	<p>Each year, accidental CO poisonings result in several deaths and hospitalizations in Minnesota. The highest number of CO poisonings occurs during the winter months. Minnesota took an important step to prevent CO poisonings when the state passed a law that requires CO alarms in all single-family homes and multi-dwelling units. The law was put into effect from 2007 to 2009. However, with no system to track CO poisonings, the Minnesota Department of Health could not know whether the law helped lower the number of CO poisonings in the state.</p>	<p>Minnesota's Tracking Program worked with the National Tracking Network to gather data and create ways to measure CO poisonings in the state. The programs put this information into a tracking report that local newspapers used to inform readers about CO poisoning prevention.</p> <p>Minnesota's Tracking Program and the state Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) are working together to collect data on the number of Minnesota homes that have CO alarms. Using data from years before and after the CO alarm law, the tracking program can follow changes in the use of CO alarms and the impact on CO poisonings and exposures.</p>	<p>The CO alarm law and the system for tracking CO poisonings are examples of the way tracking data can have an effect on state and local policy.</p> <p>Minnesota state and local health agencies will use CO tracking and BRFSS data to measure the effectiveness of the state CO alarm law. Indoor air and healthy homes programs will also use tracking data to determine the effectiveness of activities to improve public health.</p>
<p>Understanding the relationship between climate change and public health</p>	<p>The global climate is changing, causing rising temperatures, melting ice and snow, rising sea levels, and climate uncertainty. However, it is hard to measure the changes in climate regionally and locally. State and local health departments need help to understand climate change better and prepare for its possible health impacts.</p> <p>Minnesota is in a unique geographic position at the transition between the eastern forests and drier Great Plains. In this region, diseases carried by ticks and other insects or animals are common and influenced by changes in temperature and humidity. Minnesota is also located in a region where people are likely to suffer more from extreme heat.</p>	<p>Minnesota's tracking staff worked with CDC and other states in the National Tracking Network to gather data about and find ways to measure illnesses and deaths caused by heat. Minnesota's Tracking Program is using data from hospital stays and death certificates to track health outcomes of extreme heat, such as deaths, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.</p>	<p>Minnesota's Tracking Program is working with state and local health programs to help them to prepare for the health effects of climate change using climate and health data along with sound science.</p> <p>Data provided by Minnesota's climate change tracking program will help public health officials to develop effective strategies to prepare for the health effects of climate change.</p>