

NEW YORK STATE

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."

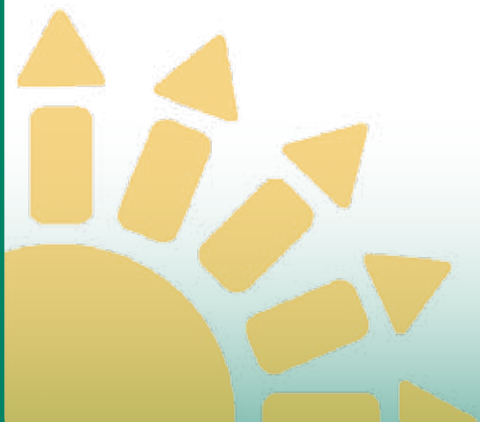
Thomas A. Burke, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Associate Dean for Public Health Practice and Training
Professor, Department of Health Policy and Management
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Why Tracking Matters in New York State

New York is a large state with a diverse landscape and a diverse population. From New York City to the Northern Adirondacks to Lake Erie, communities across the state deal with a variety of urban, suburban, and rural environmental health issues. Environmental tracking helps speed environmental health investigations, target environmental health outreach, and share information with key people. Environmental tracking's main asset is the way it combines health and environmental data with geographic information tools. This gives New York residents and policymakers access to meaningful data and other information to identify, fix, and, most important, prevent environmental problems.

New York State has been part of CDC's Tracking Program since 2002. New York began building the state network, Environmental Public Health Tracker (Tracker), in 2006. Since its 2009 launch, the Tracker has delivered easy-to-understand maps, charts, and data to New York residents and policymakers. The Tracker also improves collaboration between New York State agencies and programs. They now share common data and work together to address problems.



TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
<p>Tracking carbon monoxide risk factors to prevent poisonings</p>	<p>Many New Yorkers use portable generators when the power goes out. Generator use increases the risk of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.</p> <p>Little information is available about how many households use portable generators during power outages. Also, the number of households that have properly installed and maintained CO alarms is unknown.</p>	<p>To learn more about portable generator and CO alarm use, New York State's Tracking Program added questions to the 2008 New York State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey.</p> <p>The Tracking Program collected and analyzed survey results that showed nearly 20% of state residents and more than 33% of residents living outside major cities had a portable generator. Almost 30% of all residents did not have a CO alarm in their homes.</p>	<p>The state department of health used the tracking program information to identify areas most at risk for CO poisoning. The state worked with local health departments and other partners to distribute generator safety posters and CO poisoning-prevention door hangers to area residents.</p> <p>The survey data will track the success of the generator campaign. The data will also show whether people follow the 2009 state law mandating CO alarms in all homes.</p>
<p>Providing neighborhood-level cancer data</p>	<p>New York residents would like to see maps showing new cancer cases in their neighborhoods. The state has long struggled with how to respond to this need, which requires sharing detailed data while protecting patient identity.</p>	<p>New York State's Tracking Program worked with partners to develop the Environmental Facilities and Cancer Mapping application. It contains maps that show the number of cancer cases and locations of environmental facilities at the census block level.</p> <p>Users can search for data on 23 types of cancer and see locations of 15 types of environmental facilities.</p> <p>Because showing data at the block level could risk patients' privacy, the tracking program developed the Geographic Aggregation Tool to group blocks with few cases. This reduces the likelihood of identifying specific people.</p>	<p>With these tools, health departments can respond more quickly and easily to information requests. The public can also use this information to better understand cancer in their neighborhoods.</p> <p>Before the tracking program, this level of cancer information was not available to the public.</p>
<p>Assisting with public health investigations</p>	<p>A citizen asked the health department to look into respiratory disease in communities near an upstate New York coal-fired power plant.</p> <p>Getting, processing, and evaluating the necessary data can take a long time. Community members often want this information quickly.</p>	<p>Using data gathered through the state tracking program, the health department was able to quickly find the rates of hospital stays for asthma and other respiratory diseases in areas downwind of the power plant. The results showed fewer than expected hospital stays for asthma, bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.</p>	<p>The tracking program data on respiratory-related hospital stays were readily available. The health department investigated respiratory disease in the area and efficiently and quickly provided findings to local residents and to the media.</p>