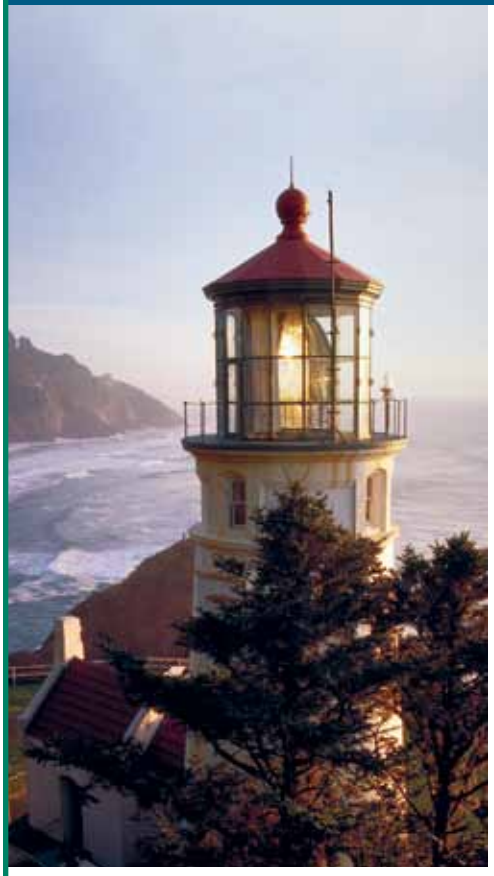
CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

OREGON

Keeping Track, Promoting Health



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

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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.

Why Tracking Matters in Oregon

Oregon is often praised for its quality of life and admired for its relatively clean air, water, and land. Outdoor environments from coastal rainforest to productive agricultural regions offer unique opportunities and challenges. Oregon is blessed with a great diversity of cultures, geology, native plants, and animals. Yet even though the state is viewed as an environmental leader, Oregonians sometimes find the greatest environmental risks inside the buildings in which they live, study, work, and play.

In 2002 the Oregon Public Health Division began receiving funding from CDC to develop a statewide tracking network. The Oregon Tracking Program provides data and information to partner programs to help them improve the health of state residents. For example, the program worked with the Oregon Tobacco Prevention and Education Program, the American Cancer Society of Oregon, and the Tobacco Free Coalition of Oregon to determine how indoor cigarette smoking affects indoor air quality. The Oregon Tracking Program also joined with the Oregon Environmental Health Assessment Program, Oregon Drinking Water Program, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, and Douglas County Health Department to measure the amount of arsenic in domestic wells in Sutherlin Valley, an area where arsenic is found naturally in the soil and bedrock. These partnerships show how tracking is used to create changes that can improve public health.

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

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TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
Understanding indoor air quality in businesses that serve liquor	In the United States, environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) causes about 3,000 lung cancer deaths in non-smokers each year. ETS is also linked to heart disease, nasal and sinus cancer, sudden infant death syndrome, asthma, middle ear infections in children, and other illnesses that affect breathing. Although data show ETS exposure is going down in the U.S., it is still a major public health concern. In 2006, only 12 states passed clean indoor air regulations that cover nearly all indoor worksites, including bars and restaurants. Oregon was not one of them.	The Oregon Tracking Program worked with several partners to conduct the Oregon Air Monitoring Project. This project examined indoor air quality in 107 hospitality locations in the state and looked at how indoor smoking affected indoor air pollution. Results of the project showed that restaurants, bars, and other hospitality locations allowing indoor smoking had poorer air quality than both indoor-smoke-free sites and outdoor air. Workers in the locations sampled were exposed to pollution levels more than three times higher than the yearly amount of fine particle air pollution that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency considers safe to breathe. This project showed that Oregon workers and people visiting bars and restaurants are exposed to harmful levels of cancer-causing chemicals and other poisons in cigarette smoke.	This study influenced state legislation passed in 2009, known as the Clean Indoor Air Act of Oregon. With a few exceptions, this legislation makes it illegal to smoke at work and in public places. Policies such as this can reduce ETS exposure and improve public health.
Reducing exposure to arsenic from drinking water	Studies from the 1970s showed elevated levels of arsenic in private wells in the Sutherlin Valley area. The arsenic found in these wells most likely comes from the bedrock and soil. Long-term exposure to arsenic through drinking water is known to cause various types of cancer, including lung, skin, bladder, kidney, nasal passage, liver, and prostate. Arsenic exposure may also affect reproductive organs, the brain and nervous system, the heart and blood vessels, and cause darkening and corns on skin. Since the state has not required water to be tested for arsenic, people living in the area for many years may have been drinking water containing amounts of arsenic that could be harmful to health. Also, new homeowners may be unaware of arsenic in their water supply. Without more current information about arsenic levels, state or local health officials cannot know the best ways to protect peoples' health.	The Oregon Tracking Program, working with several partners, measured arsenic levels in more than 100 home wells in Sutherlin Valley. Several wells were found to have arsenic levels higher than healthy drinking water standards. People using those wells were notified. A community meeting was held to explain the results of the testing and to inform residents about ways to remove arsenic from the well water. The partners also provided fact sheets and health information resources. In addition, local newspapers published articles notifying residents of testing results and encouraging them to test their well water regularly.	This study influenced state legislation, passed in 2009, that added arsenic to the list of substances tested in private wells. Now, every time a piece of property with a private well is sold, the water must be tested for arsenic and other contaminants. This testing will limit exposure to arsenic and lower the possibility for health problems caused by it.

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National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network
www.cdc.gov/ephtracking

Oregon Environmental Public Health Tracking Program
http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/epht/index.shtml