

SOUTH CAROLINA

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 South Carolina

In August of 2009, South Carolina became one of six additional states awarded CDC funding to build a local tracking network. South Carolina's Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) originally started the state tracking program using state funding.

South Carolina's tracking program makes health and environmental data and resources more accessible to communities and promotes positive public health change in South Carolina.

Lessons learned from the program have been applied to the South Carolina Community Assessment Network (SCAN). This is the Web-based data query system for SC DHEC. This has enabled the state to better evaluate, display, and explain environmental and health data to stakeholders. For example, the Birth Defects and Childhood Lead programs now have a platform to display data and to share important information.

As part of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program, South Carolina has strengthened its environmental public health workforce in areas across health and environmental fields. South Carolina has also created new opportunities for collaboration both within the agency and with external partners. One example is partnering with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other state agencies to develop a Coastal Environmental Health Web page to provide important data and information about the state's coastal region.



TRACKING IN ACTION

	The Problem	Tracking in Action	Improved Public Health
<p>Making environmental health data accessible to everyone</p>	<p>Environmental public health data are often difficult to explain in plain language. Public health and environmental professionals use technical terms to describe such data. If information is too hard to understand, people will not use South Carolina's Tracking Network.</p>	<p>South Carolina's Environmental Public Health Tracking Program is working toward showing and describing data simply. For example, a section of each topic area on the Web site will use everyday examples to describe complex scientific concepts.</p>	<p>People are more likely to use easy-to-understand information, tools, and data. Armed with knowledge, people can make better decisions about reducing health risk and improving overall health.</p> <p>Encouraging use of the state tracking network may increase awareness about environmental health issues. It might also help to explain why the state needs to take certain actions to protect the environment.</p>
<p>Sharing information about the coastal environment</p>	<p>South Carolina's large, densely populated coastal area attracts tourists year round. Currently, no one resource informs people about all coastal area issues such as beach conditions and closures.</p>	<p>The South Carolina Tracking Program is partnering with state and federal agencies to develop a Coastal Environmental Health Web page. The tracking Web site will host this page.</p>	<p>Residents and visitors to South Carolina's coastal area will have access to information such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real-time weather, • environmental advisories and closures, • beach conditions, and • marine animal diseases. <p>This information helps residents and visitors better understand how the state's coastal environment may affect travel plans and health.</p>