

# Washington

## » and environmental public health

Washington is diverse in culture, ecology and ethnicity. East of the Cascade Mountains environmental public health issues, namely limited resources and poor infrastructure, are associated with agriculture and are typical of rural areas. West of the mountains, issues are typical of those associated with a dense and expanding population, industry and a coastal economy.

### CRITICAL ISSUES

#### PROTECTING SHELLFISH

Shellfish safety, critical to economic and public health, is threatened by biological and chemical contamination in the Puget Sound. In 2005, Washington drafted rules and funded public health programs to enhance water quality and protect shellfish in the Puget Sound (by managing on-site sewage systems and preventing chemical discharges).

Source: Washington State Department of Health, Division of Environmental Health, 2005 Annual Report

#### CONTROLLING VECTOR-BORNE DISEASE

Attention to increasing threats carried by animal vectors—West Nile virus, monkeypox, and avian influenza—builds capacity in emergency response but undermines capacity for everyday protection of air, water and food.

Source: Zoonotic Diseases and Exotic Pets: A Public Health Policy Analysis, October 2004

#### MANAGING DEVELOPMENT

With increasing population and economic pressures, environmental public health practitioners struggle to articulate the importance of measures designed to protect people's health in land use development policies.

### GREATEST CHALLENGES

#### FRAGMENTED SYSTEM

With 35 independent local health jurisdictions and multiple agencies charged with different aspects of environmental public health, community health protection requires vigilant coordination.

#### WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT

A significant portion of the states most qualified workers anticipate retiring within five years. Only one Washington academic institution is preparing environmental public health workers.

Source: Everybody Counts: The Public Health Work Force in Washington State, April 2004

#### STRETCHED RESOURCES

Environmental public health programs are critically underfunded, with a dangerous reliance on fee-based funding for vital services.

Source: Joint Select Committee on Public Health Financing: Draft Findings: June 2006

In Washington, as with other states, there is a lack of consistent public health protection across the states communities. The Washington Public Health Partnership is spearheading two efforts to address this issue—development of public performance measures through a pilot project with four local health jurisdictions and establishment of a stable, flexible, and equitable public health funding source through the state legislature.



### Community Profile



**Judy Stender**  
It's A New Day  
Preschool & Child Care  
Everett, Washington

*"Because of the Partners in Child Care Program, I am being proactive in protecting my home, my business, and especially the safety and health of the children in my care."*

Judy learned through a septic consultation that a failing septic system can create a public hazard if children are exposed to raw sewage. An environmental health specialist from the Snohomish Health District helped her to understand how her septic system works, how to prevent future problems, and how to identify warning signs of system failure. Judy is proactively seeking to connect to the sewer 300 feet down the street.

## GREATEST CHALLENGES

### Fragmented System

In Washington, public health services are provided through a complex and decentralized system.

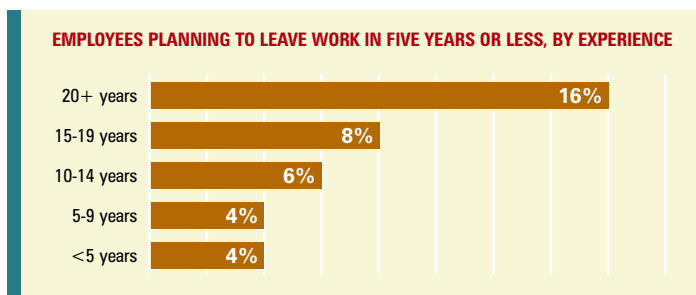
At the local level there are 35 independent health jurisdictions that vary in services, personnel and financial resources.

At the state level, while authority for environmental public health lies primarily within the State Departments of Health, Ecology, and Agriculture, several other agencies may be involved. For example, shellfish safety requires coordination of five state agencies, two federal agencies, tribes, industry, local public health agencies, and two nonprofits.

Source: Joint Select Committee on Public Health Financing: Draft Findings June 2006; 2004 Public Health Improvement Plan: Transforming Public Health In Challenging Times, Washington State Department of Health, December 2004

### Work Force Development

With the anticipated departure of nearly one in six of the most experienced environmental public health workers within the next five years, and another 42 percent of employees unsure when they will leave, succession planning and policies that increase workers' commitment are essential.



Source: Everybody Counts: The Public Health Work Force in Washington State, April 2004

### Stretched Resources

There are emerging threats posed by environmental hazards that the current public health system cannot adequately protect against as a result of the limited resources that are generated by the fee-based system.

**ESTIMATED FUNDS (IN MILLIONS) TO SUSTAIN A FUNCTIONAL LOCAL HEALTH SYSTEM**

	Local Health Spending in '04	Estimated Funding Needed	Unmet Funding "Gap"	% Increase Needed to Fill Gap
Assuring Safe Food, Water and Air	\$61	\$134	\$73	120%

Source: Joint Selection on Public Health Financing: Draft Findings: June 2006

## CDC INVESTMENT

Grants from the National Center for Environmental Health, Environmental Health Services Branch, have contributed to increased capacity in Washington:

- The Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP), of the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of Washington, provides critical training to improve the capacity of public health departments to respond to emerging environmental public health problems and to effectively communicate during routine and emergency response. NWCPHP also mentors the next generation of environmental public health leaders.
- The Island County Environmental Health Initiative has increased public understanding of environmental issues, improved the health department's data storage and retrieval capacity, and resulted in community supported plans related to illegal dumping, pedestrian-friendly communities, West Nile virus, and arsenic in drinking water.
- The Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute has supported leadership training for four environmental public health professionals, resulting in innovative programs such as Partners in Child Care, Snohomish Health District and development of new approaches to prevent and eliminate childhood lead poisoning in Seattle-King County.

## Take Action!

### Support Environmental Public Health Services!

Every day, environmental public health practitioners guard our communities against threats to our food supply, drinking water, air quality and sanitation systems. This vital protection requires investment at the local, state and federal levels.

The National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is spearheading efforts to revitalize environmental public health services (see: [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs)).

***Please support... environmental public health services are vital to everyone, everywhere, every day.***



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