



Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network Act of 2007

The World Health Organization estimates that thirteen million deaths annually are due to preventable environmental causes. The air that we breathe and the water that we drink can jeopardize our health if contaminated with chemical, biological, or other hazards. Chronic diseases such as asthma and cancer are among the most frequent adverse health effects of environmental hazards in the U.S. It is critical that we have the ability to track the relationship between environmental exposures and the incidence and distribution of disease. The Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network Act of 2007 (S. 2082/H.R. 3643) would establish a Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network and expand CDC's biomonitoring activities. A comprehensive environmental public health network will provide policymakers, public health professionals and all Americans with information about the links between environmental exposure and health outcomes, information that could save lives.

Biomonitoring in Action

Through biomonitoring techniques, we can reliably measure the level of exposure a person has to more than 300 chemicals, determine which population groups are at high risk for exposure and adverse health effects, assess public health interventions and monitor exposure trends over time. Here are two examples of biomonitoring success:

- CDC's Environmental Health Laboratory measures lead levels in the U.S. population. Results of CDC's second national survey, covering the years 1976-1980, showed declines in blood lead levels matched declines in levels of lead in gasoline, ten times more than predicted from environmental modeling. This finding was a major consideration in the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to further restrict the use of leaded gasoline and resulted in the removal of lead in gasoline in almost every industrialized nation.
- Cotinine is a metabolite that forms in the body when a person is exposed to nicotine. Using biomonitoring, CDC showed that people who reported more exposure to environmental tobacco smoke in the workplace had measurably higher levels of cotinine, which indicated higher actual exposure. These data provided justification for establishing regulations restricting smoking in public buildings.

Health Tracking

The Pew Commission on Environmental Health recommended the development of a Nationwide Health Tracking Network to help track environmental hazards and the diseases they may cause. The Network would coordinate and integrate local, state, and federal health agencies' collection of critical health and environmental data. Since 2002, Congress has provided funding for health tracking pilot programs, funding only 16 states and one city in FY 2008, down from 24 grantees. Since FY 2002, tracking has led to 38 public health actions to prevent or control potential adverse health effects from environmental exposures. For example, states have used their tracking grants for a variety of projects, such as tracking mercury levels in fish, monitoring the relationship between moisture and mold problems in schools and student health outcomes, and tracking pesticide use. We need a national health tracking program so that all states have compatible and connected systems that collect, analyze, interpret and disseminate data about exposure to environmental hazards, and the health effects potentially related to these hazards.