



Understanding Environmental Causes of Disease

FY 2012 Labor HHS Appropriations Bill Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - National Center for Environmental Health

	2010 (CR)	2012 President	2012 TFAH
National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network	\$33,124,000	\$32,141,000 ¹	\$43,000,000

Background: There is a connection between our environment and our health. Outdoor air pollutants cause an estimated 50,000 – 100,000 premature deaths annually. Illnesses stemming from air pollution alone cost about \$100 billion annually in the U.S. With a nationwide tracking program, we can begin to pull the pieces of the puzzle together to better understand the role of the environment on our health.

In 2002, Congress provided the CDC with funding to develop an environmental health tracking program and network that would build our capacity to understand and respond to environmental health issues and help document links between environmental hazards and chronic disease. The mission of the Tracking Program is to provide information that communities can use to improve their health; the information will come from a nationwide network that brings together health and environmental data. CDC funded 24 grantees for earlier stages of planning and capacity building. These pilot projects linked sets of existing health outcome data with data on environmental hazards; identified environmental health problems; and generated actions to improve the health of communities.

Results: The National Tracking Network was launched in July of 2009, and CDC continues to expand the quality and quantity of health and environmental information and data available through the Network. Since its launch, CDC added new data for cancer, reproductive health outcomes, birth defects and demographics and socioeconomic status. In addition, CDC expanded the network to include more years of data on outdoor air quality, drinking water quality, hospitalizations for asthma, cardiovascular disease, and carbon monoxide poisoning, and childhood lead poisoning. In 2011, CDC will add data for climate change, developmental disabilities, and community design, increased mapping capabilities, as well as additional types of asthma data.

In 2009, Johns Hopkins University evaluated the impact of the tracking funding felt by the state and local grantees. Impact reported included increased data access for health effects (neurological disease, reproductive outcomes, respiratory disease) and hazard and exposure data (air pollution, heavy metals, and water pollutants). In addition, an increase in data use and dissemination was reported across all categories of data. Furthermore, 50% of grantees responded that tracking data allows them to respond more efficiently and effectively to requests from policy makers, other agencies and the public. Over half of the respondents reported specific policy and/or program changes due to tracking.

Recent Funding History: CDC now funds 23 states and one city to build and implement local tracking networks that feed into the national Tracking Network at FY10 levels of \$33.1 million. In FY11, \$35 million was transferred from the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) for environmental public health tracking, which enables CDC to fund new states/cities and enhance current activities, including

¹ This includes \$9,000,000 from the Prevention and Public Health Fund.

making new datasets available and better linking environmental health exposures to health outcomes. The FY12 President's budget requests \$9 million to be transferred from the PPHF. This request is \$26 million less than FY11 PPHF appropriations. With this reduction, up to three-quarters of states/cities supported with FY11 PPHF funds could not be sustained. Capacity building and implementation of a state/city tracking network takes about three years. One year funding for states is not adequate to fully implement an environmental public health tracking system.

The impact of the requested decreased FY12 funding levels could result in only 24 states/cities funded for tracking, only 16 which will have functioning tracking networks.

Recommendation:

Provide \$43 million for the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network to expand the program to link environmental and health data to identify problems and effective solutions that will reduce the burden of chronic disease. This level of funding would enable CDC to fund up to seven additional new grantees (states, cities, or counties).

Even just an additional \$5 million would enable the program to add at least three states to the existing network. However, the current level of funding is not sufficient to fill the health and environmental data gap across the nation that is preventing our full understanding of how our health is affected by the environment.