

VERSION 2.0 WORK IN PROGRESS: Environmental Public Health Think Tank Summary May 2019



The Public Health Accreditation Board is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to improving and protecting the health of the public by advancing and ultimately transforming the quality and performance of state, local, tribal, and territorial public health departments.



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PHAB convened environmental public health experts from across the country in a think tank on May 21-22, 2019 for the purpose of reviewing what had changed in environmental public health since the accreditation standards and measures were published in 2013. Proposed recommendations from the think tank discussion were then shared at the National Environmental Health Association's Annual Education Conference on July 11, 2019. This summary contains the recommendations from both sessions.

Recommendations for Proposed Changes to the Standards and Measures Related to EPH:

- A. In many of the current measures, environmental public health is included with public health hazards and infectious diseases. A recommendation is to clarify where EPH should be called out specifically in the examples.
- B. Be more specific about those events that would trigger an Emergency Operations Plan with environmental public health implications (Measure 2.2.2A). This would include both more specificity about what EPH events trigger an EOP as well as examples in the documentation guidance.
- C. Health departments should have access to expertise to track/review trends in EPH enforcement activities and complaints as well as from debriefings or other evaluation processes (Measure 6.3.4A) to inform quality improvement and performance management. PHAB should be clear about whether such analysis requires a specific skill set, such as environmental epidemiology or whether this is not detailed analysis but tracking and monitoring issues, complaints, etc. with enforcement activities to inform QI/PM.
- D. CDC and NEHA have done a lot of work in analyzing the EPH workforce including the questions related to credentialing (UNCOVER EPH). This information was referred to the PHAB Workforce Think Tank.
- E. Environmental public health increasingly depends on robust information systems to conduct their jobs. Assurance of a sound EPH information infrastructure to make data-informed decisions was referred to the PHAB Data/Surveillance Think Tank.
- F. Environmental public health has a role in addressing the social determinants of health and health equity. In the measures where those areas are addressed, PHAB should include EPH language.

G. Emerging areas for EPH include environmental justice; effects of the climate on health; and environmental health assessments using a health lens analysis. To the extent that PHAB will address any of these concepts in the updated standards and measures, EPH considerations should be included.

H. Measure 6.3.2 and other measures address “frequency” of inspections. It was recommended that the standards and measures require “schedules” (which may require varying frequencies).

I. Measure 6.3.5 calls for notification of the public of enforcement violations. A recommendation was made for PHAB to consider what goal this requirement would address for health departments. A potential improved measure would call for how the public can access routine inspection reports and/or public notifications of those enforcement actions that identify specific public health threats. In general, the recommendation was to use the term “collaborative compliance” rather than “enforcement.” The emphasis should be on educating and the provision of technical assistance so that standards are met and problems are corrected. Enforcement is formal action and is the last resort.

Other Recommendations Unrelated to Specific Standards and Measures:

1. The crosswalk between the FDA Retail Food Safety Guidelines and the PHAB Accreditation Standards and Measures was identified as a helpful resource. A recommendation was made to do that work again when the revised standards and measures have been completed.

2. A PHAB tip sheet could be developed to highlight measures for which environmental public health examples could be used and would be appropriate. The tip sheet could include examples of such items as how states and locals work together to differentiate their roles; examples of how EPH examples could be used across domains; and examples of how EPH staff are included in the CHA/CHIP process.

3. Recommended Changes in Terms and Definitions:

| Current Terms | Existing Definitions | Proposed Definitions / Recommendations |
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| <p>Environmental Public Health</p> | <p>Environmental health is the science and practice of preventing human injury and illness and promoting well-being by: identifying and evaluating environmental sources and hazardous agents; and limiting exposures to hazardous physical, chemical, and biological agents in air, water, soil, food, and other environmental media or settings that may adversely affect human health. https://www.neha.org/about-neha/definitions-environmental-health</p> | <p>Environmental Health is the branch of public health that focuses on the interrelationships between people and their environment, promotes human health and well-being, and fosters healthy and safe communities. As a fundamental component of a comprehensive public health system, environmental health works to advance policies and programs to reduce chemical and other environmental exposures in air, water, soil, and food to protect residents and provide communities with healthier environments. Environmental health protects the public by tracking environmental exposures in communities across the United States and potential links with disease outcomes.</p> <p>Adopted from NEHPC; https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/2017/environmental-health-playbook</p> <p>Recommendation: There was a recommendation to remove “Public” from the term, so it reads “Environmental Health.” However, this might affect the original purpose for using EPH to distinguish EH from a public health perspective versus that of other environmental agencies. Additionally, would this require changing EPH to EH throughout the standards and measures? Would this have bearing on other terms that use EPH, such as EPH functions?</p> |

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| <p>Environmental Public Health Consultation</p> | <p>Environmental public health consultation is advice and guidance provided by an environmental public health professional in response to a specific request for information on a potential hazard or condition that may adversely affect human health or the environment. Consultations are informative and educational and not associated with regulatory or enforcement actions. (Public Health Accreditation Board. <i>Environmental Public Health Think Tank Report. 2010-2011</i>)</p> | <p>Recommendation: Eliminate this definition, considering it does not appear in the standards and measures.</p> |
| <p>Environmental Public Health Event</p> | <p>Environmental public health events are occurrences that may impact public health or the environment. Examples include natural events such as earthquakes, floods, wildfires, heat waves and drought; technological incidents such as explosions or the release of chemicals from manufacturing facilities, oil tanker spills and train derailments; deliberate release of biological, chemical or radioactive material by terrorists; and disease outbreaks caused by an infection transmitted through person-to-person contact, animal-to-person contact, or from contamination of food and water or other media. (Public Health Accreditation Board. <i>Environmental Public Health Think Tank Report. 2010-2011</i>)</p> | <p>Recommendation: In the term, replace the word “event” with “incident.”</p> <p>Recommendation: Revise first sentence in the definition: Environmental public health incidents are occurrences that may impact the environment and public health.</p> |
| <p>Environmental Public Health Expertise</p> | <p>Environmental public health expertise is the special knowledge, skills and abilities of an environmental public health practitioner that allow them to anticipate, recognize, and respond to environmental public health challenges. Human resources are organized into department, programs, and agencies to provide expertise on drinking water, food protection, vector control, community environmental health assessment and other areas of environmental public health. (Public Health Accreditation Board. <i>Environmental Public Health Think Tank Report. 2010-2011</i>)</p> | <p>Environmental public health professionals possessing the appropriate academic education and training and registration or certification to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigate, sample, measure, and assess hazardous environmental agents in various environmental media and settings; • recommend and apply protective interventions that control hazards to health; • develop, promote, and enforce guidelines, policies, laws, and regulations; • develop and provide health communications and educational materials; • manage and lead environmental health units within organizations; • perform systems analysis; • engage community members to understand, address, and resolve problems; • review construction and land use plans and make recommendations; • interpret research utilizing science and evidence to understand the relationship between health and environment; and • interpret data and prepare technical summaries and reports. <p>Adopted from NEHA, 2013; https://www.neha.org/about-neha/definitions-environmental-health</p> |
| <p>Environmental Public</p> | <p>As an integral part of the public health system, environmental public health helps to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy. The core functions of environmental public health</p> | <p>Environmental public health functions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide timely, statewide, and locally relevant and accurate information to the state, health care system, and community on |

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| <p>Health Functions Environmental Public Health Functions</p> | <p>include the assessment of information on the health and environmental conditions of communities, the development of comprehensive environmental public health policy, and assurance that environmental public health services are available in all communities. These three core functions of environmental public health are defined further, expanded and operationalized in the ten essential services of environmental public health and the Environmental Public Health Performance Standards. (Public Health Accreditation Board. Environmental Public Health Think Tank Report. 2010-2011)</p> | <p>environmental public health issues and health impacts from common environmental or toxic exposures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify statewide and local community environmental public health partners and their capacities, develop and implement a prioritized plan, and seek action funding for high priority initiatives. • Conduct mandated environmental public health laboratory testing, inspections, and oversight to protect food, recreation sites, and drinking water; manage liquid and solid waste streams safely; and, identify other public health hazards related to environmental factors in accordance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations. • Protect workers and the public from chemical and radiation hazards in accordance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations • Participate in broad land use planning and sustainable development to encourage decisions that promote positive public health outcomes (e.g. housing and urban development, recreational facilities, and transportation systems) and resilient communities. • Coordinate and integrate categorically-funded environmental public health programs and services. <p>Adopted from PHNCI, 2018; https://phnci.org/uploads/resource-files/FPHS-Factsheet-November-2018.pdf</p> |
| <p>Environmental Public Health Hazards</p> | <p>Environmental public health hazards are situations or materials that pose a threat to human health and safety in the built or natural environment, as well as to the health and safety of other animals and plants, and to the proper functioning of an ecosystem, habitat, or other natural resource. Chemical, biological, radiological, or physical agents in the environment that have the capacity to produce adverse health effects or ecological damage are considered hazards. Risk is the probability or likelihood that an adverse outcome will occur in a person, population or environment exposed to a particular concentration or dose of the agent. Risk is a function of exposure and dose. A hazard is the source of a risk. The likelihood of harm from an exposure distinguishes risk from hazard. Risk is created by a hazard. A toxic chemical that is a hazard to human health does not constitute a risk unless humans are exposed to it. Environmental public health programs prevent risks to human health and the environment by identifying and controlling hazards and preventing exposure to potentially harmful agents or conditions. (Public Health Accreditation Board. Environmental Public Health Think Tank Report. 2010-2011)</p> | <p>Environmental public health hazards are situations or materials that pose a threat to human health and safety in the built or natural environment. Chemical, biological, radiological, or physical agents in the environment that have the capacity to produce adverse health effects or ecological damage are considered hazards. Environmental public health programs prevent risks to human health and the environment by identifying and controlling hazards and preventing exposure to potentially harmful agents or conditions. (Public Health Accreditation Board. Environmental Public Health Think Tank Report. 2010-2011)</p> |
| <p>No existing term</p> | | <p>Recommendation: Add the term “Environmental Epidemiology”</p> <p>Possible definitions: An Environmental Epidemiologist is a person who collects, analyzes, interprets, and disseminates data related to acute and chronic diseases or risk factors where an environmental exposure</p> |

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| | | <p>is important. CSTE, 2013; http://www.cste2.org/2013eca/CSTEEHEpidemiologyCapacityAssessment2014final.pdf</p> <p>Environmental epidemiology is the study of the effect on human health of physical, biologic, and chemical factors in the external environment, broadly conceived. By examining specific populations or communities exposed to different ambient environments, it seeks to clarify the relationship between physical, biologic or chemical factors and human health. Committee on Environmental Epidemiology; https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK234293/</p> |
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