

Climate Change

The Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP) is working with partners in the University of Washington's Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences and Climate Impacts Group to study climate change in the Northwest.

Scientists will evaluate the impact of climate change on human health in the region, work with local communities to study health risks that will likely occur in the next 35 years and uncover how communities might mitigate those risks.

The University of Washington team will investigate health impacts of two climate trends in the Northwest: increase in extreme heat events and worsening air quality. This project will analyze the mortality and morbidity risks for specific communities as these climate change trends continue.

NWCPHP's responsibility within this project will be to develop strategies and tools for health departments to communicate effectively with local communities about these health risks. NWCPHP will work with public health officials to develop strategies that engage and support decision makers, health care providers, tribal councils, and the public. In addition to addressing health risks, we will assist public health practitioners to communicate about new programs and policies to prevent or mitigate the health risks of climate change.

Richard Fenske, from the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, is the primary investigator. Fenske was a senior author in a June 2009 report to the Washington State Legislature that documented excess mortality during heat events in the greater Seattle area over the past 25 years. The report also predicted significantly more heat- and air pollution-related deaths in Washington in the years to come. This project is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the next three years.

Environmental Health Training

Climate change research is a newer endeavor for the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP), but, during the past decade, NWCPHP has become nationally recognized for its training of environmental health professionals with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Professional organizations, such as National Environmental Health Association, provide technical training for environmental health professionals, but our region expressed a need for courses on effective communication, public health law, community collaboration, and program evaluation. In the early years of NWCPHP, Chuck Treser, of NWCPHP and UW Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences faculty, advocated the importance of making environmental health part of the NWCPHP's mission.

From our CDC funding, we have produced a module that helps environmental health professionals integrate the 10 Essential Public Health Services into environmental health practice. To date, this training module has been distributed by the CDC to more than 3,000 local and state health departments.

The CDC also funded a Regional Academic Environmental Public Health Center (RAEPHC) at NWCPHP. The RAEPHC's aim was to provide technical assistance, assessments, training, and evaluations to environmental health professionals in nine states. Carl Osaki, a NWCPHP faculty member, provided critical expertise and oversight for these CDC-funded projects.

We look forward to continued collaboration with our environmental health partners.