

NEHA NEWS

Environmental Health Workforce Initiatives, August 2025 to July 2026: Advancing Environmental Public Health Through Capacity Building and Innovation

As our Program and Partnership Development (PPD) Department entered the next year of its comprehensive environmental health initiatives in August 2025, the department is poised to deliver transformative programs that will strengthen the environmental public health workforce across state, tribal, local, and territorial health departments. Our portfolio encompasses multiple strategic projects funded through cooperative agreements and subawards from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Each project is designed to address crucial gaps in workforce capacity, training, and emergency preparedness while advancing environmental public health infrastructure nationwide.

CDC Cooperative Agreement Projects

The following six initiatives are supported through our cooperative agreement with CDC, representing our core commitment to building environmental public health workforce capacity nationwide.

1. Climate and Environmental Health Capacity Building: This comprehensive project aims to build capacity among environmental public health practitioners to address the human health effects of climate change, with particular emphasis this year on the updated Building Resilience Against Climate Effects (BRACE) framework. This project is 100% supported by funding from CDC.

Key Activities

- Preconference workshop at the NEHA 2026 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition focused on the updated BRACE framework
- Educational resource development including webinars and fact sheets on BRACE framework implementation
- Capacity-building training through partnership with ecoAmerica's Climate for Health program
- Resource development to support our Climate and Health Program Committee initiatives

2. Environmental Health Workforce Development and Training: Addressing crucial workforce challenges, this project focuses on enhancing capacity through internships, leadership training, and collaborative educational opportunities. With many practitioners lacking formal education in environmental health or public health, this initiative bridges critical knowledge gaps to prepare the next generation of environmental health professionals. This project is 100% supported by funding from CDC.

Key Activities

- The National Environmental Public Health Internship Program (NEPHIP) connects students from programs accredited by the National Environmental Health Science and Protection Accreditation Council (EHAC) with environmental public health programs in health departments nationwide to provide

professional skills development for the students and to help health departments fill gaps in workforce capacity

- The Career Exploration Program (CEP) offers experiential learning opportunities within local health departments providing environmental health services in the U.S. Pacific Islands, which supports workforce development and fills crucial capacity needs
- Campus Grand Rounds Seminars for students on various environmental health topics
- Develop and implement training modules to prepare students for professional work environments, which addresses key knowledge and skill gaps prior to internship placement
- In-person NEHA 2026 AEC attendance for NEPHIP interns and Environmental Health Leadership Academy (EHLA) participants to support professional growth, peer learning, and network development

3. Foodborne Illness Outbreak Investigation Training: This project strengthens health department capacity to investigate foodborne illness outbreaks by providing specialized training and promoting use of CDC's National Environmental Assessment Reporting System (NEARS), which captures comprehensive data on environmental causes of outbreaks. This project is 100% supported by funding from CDC.

Key Activities

- In-person outbreak investigation training to build competency in conducting thorough investigations
- Professional development in outbreak detection, investigation, and response
- NEARS promotion to support adoption of CDC's surveillance system

4. Food Safety Surveillance and Response Capacity: Focused on improving enteric disease surveillance and outbreak response, this project strengthens the capacity of environmental health professionals working as part of multidisciplinary teams to detect, investigate, control, and prevent foodborne illnesses. This project is supported by funding from CDC.

Key Activities

- Multidisciplinary team training to improve performance and reduce foodborne illness, including the Integrated Foodborne Outbreak Response and Management (InFORM) regional trainings
- Capacity building for rapid and effective enteric disease surveillance and response

5. Private Water Network: The Private Water Network (PWN) serves as a vital virtual community connecting professionals who protect public health from contaminants in private drinking water sources and federally unregulated drinking water systems. This project is 100% supported by funding from CDC.

Key Activities

- Conduct the annual evaluation of PWN

- Develop a comprehensive 3-year strategic plan for PWN that will guide the implementation activities for years 3–5 of the CDC cooperative agreement
- Facilitate at least two PWN Open Forums by recruiting PWN partners to participate in topic-focused webinars to address crucial workforce needs, knowledge gaps, and emerging issues in the private water and onsite wastewater sectors
- Develop and deliver a preconference workshop at the NEHA 2026 AEC focused on private water and onsite wastewater systems
- Develop and implement a PWN Expert Spotlight Series featuring two virtual sessions highlighting the expertise of PWN subscribers that will include focuses on innovative practices, solutions to common challenges, and emerging issues in private water and onsite wastewater management
- Continue administration and coordination of the Private Well and Decentralized Wastewater Program Committee with planned project activities including a NEHA 2026 AEC presentation on onsite wastewater dilemmas, the development of three priority resources that align with the AEC presentation, and support to further grow the PWN resource library

6. Strategic Workforce Development and Data Modernization:

This comprehensive strategic initiative encompasses workforce development, data modernization, and partnership engagement to build a more skilled and resilient environmental public health workforce capable of addressing contemporary challenges and emergencies. This project is supported by funding from CDC.

Key Strategies

Workforce Development Strategy

- EHLA coordination and management
- Workforce capacity building for environmental public health professionals through quarterly Grand Rounds seminars
- Program promotion to increase awareness and participation in workforce development programs
- Development of a mold resource guide for environmental health professionals

Data Modernization and Informatics Strategy

- Informatics Program Committee facilitation to advance data modernization goals
- Data modernization initiatives including an expanded guide on data and informatics
- Partnership development and engagement strategy
- Rural and Frontier Program to address unique environmental health challenges
- Tribal Environmental Public Health Program Committee to address tribal community needs

Additional Grand Funded Initiatives

Beyond our main CDC cooperative agreement, we are pursuing specialized initiatives through targeted grants and subawards that

address crucial environmental health needs in specific populations and geographic regions.

1. U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) Environmental Health Capacity Project: Building on years of collaboration with the USVI Department of Environmental Health, this Year 5 Supplemental project expands our work in data sharing, workflow optimization, technical assistance, and training. The new focus areas address spatial data utilization and emergency preparedness to enhance USVI's ability to collect, analyze, and act on inspection data while strengthening disaster response capabilities. This project is 100% supported by CDC.

Key Activities

- GIS fact sheet development to help environmental health professionals apply spatial data for evidence-based decision-making
- Emergency preparedness training, with a data focus, tailored to strengthen USVI's ability to prepare, respond, and recover from environmental health hazards during emergencies and disasters
- Training impact evaluation to measure the effectiveness of delivered trainings

2. Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) Private Water Safety Initiative: Approximately 15% of people in the U.S. rely on private domestic well water that is not federally regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act. This subaward addresses water access disparities in vulnerable communities—including those with low socioeconomic status, rural populations, Native American tribes, Alaskan Natives, and U.S. territories—by providing comprehensive training to water safety and environmental health professionals.

Planned Deliverables

- Private water training in Alaska
- Territory-focused private water system training in Puerto Rico
- Spanish language resources development addressing private water safety
- Private water webinar series focused on rural communities, emphasizing well maintenance and post-flood care
- Tribal-focused in-person training providing regional training opportunities
- Rural community resources addressing emerging issues in well safety and care

3. Gulf South Vector Control Education Partnership: In partnership with Gulf South Vector, this project expands vector-related educational opportunities for environmental public health professionals and students. Addressing the rising threat of vectorborne diseases—often exacerbated by understaffing, inadequate funding, and gaps in vector control expertise—this initiative strengthens workforce capacity to effectively monitor and respond to threats from mosquitos, ticks, rodents, and other disease vectors.

NEHA NEWS

Planned Deliverables

- Rodent control webinar series
- Bed bug webinar series
- Rodent control preconference workshop at NEHA 2026 AEC
- Sharing of the Gulf South Vector newsletter, which is a quarterly publication featuring recent events, emerging trends, and vector-related topics

Looking Ahead

Through our diverse portfolio of CDC cooperative agreement projects and other specialized subaward initiatives, our PPD department is committed to advancing environmental public health infrastructure and workforce capacity across the nation. By investing in training, leadership development, data modernization,

emergency preparedness, and collaborative partnerships, we are building a more resilient and capable environmental health workforce prepared to address both current challenges and emerging threats to public health.

Our comprehensive approach ensures that environmental public health professionals at all levels—from students entering the field to seasoned leaders—have access to the tools, knowledge, and support systems necessary to protect and promote community health. Whether addressing climate change impacts, foodborne illness outbreaks, private water safety, vectorborne disease threats, or emergency preparedness in underserved communities, these initiatives represent our commitment to excellence in environmental public health practice and our dedication to supporting the professionals who serve on the front lines of environmental public health protection. ✨

Did You Know?

We need your help to shape the future of body art regulation. Your responses to our needs assessment will guide future training programs, inspection resources, and policy recommendations to ensure consistent, effective, and collaborative oversight of the body art industry. Take the assessment at www.surveymonkey.com/r/H5F3RXX.

a neha program

STUDENT RESEARCH COMPETITION**2026 Student Research Competition Is Open!**

Students of environmental health degree programs are invited to participate in the 2026 NEHA Student Research Competition (formerly held by the Association of Environmental Health Academic Programs).

You could earn:

- Attendance at our 2026 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition
- A cash stipend
- An opportunity to present your research
- Recognition in our *Journal of Environmental Health*

Four projects will be selected!

Submissions accepted until February 28, 2026.



neha.org/student-research-competition

