

**National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences  
2002 Annual COEP Meeting  
October 19-22, 2002**

***Hosted by:*  
University of Washington  
Center for Ecogenetics and Environmental Health  
Seattle, WA**

**Session Abstracts**

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## **Iowa Town Meeting**

### **"Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations: Airing the Environmental Health Issues"**

#### **The University of Iowa Environmental Health Sciences Research Center**

CAFOs have emerged as the central environmental health concern among rural residents in Iowa. This meeting offered a slate of experts to address the scientific foundation of the topic, and a panel of rural residents and pork producers to discuss community concerns. In addition, there was an opportunity for audience questions and comments.

The goals of the Town Meeting were as follows:

- Discuss environmental and public health issues related to CAFOs including air, soil and water quality; waste treatment; off-site exposures; and antibiotic resistance
- Provide the public with the most recent and scientific information
- Discuss current and achievable control technologies
- Foster partnerships among stakeholders
- Inform participants of the role of NIEHS in safeguarding environmental health
- Provide participants with the opportunity to voice their opinions

*Center in Molecular Toxicology: The Community Forum Experience.* W. Bradley Hawkins, Center in Molecular Toxicology, Vanderbilt University, 638 RRB, Nashville, TN 37232-0146

The Center in Molecular Toxicology recognized a need for increased interaction with the surrounding community and developed a seminar series to provide environmental health and science information to the general public. This community forum seminar series focuses upon environmental health issues, in particular those of local and state concern. To promote community interaction, the seminar series was designed to provide ample time for the audience to discuss the topic with the presenters. The community forums are held regularly during the year and have covered a wide range topics. These topics have included cancer and the environment, herbal medicines, environmental exposures and Parkinson's Disease, the genome project and Tennessee's public health infrastructure including health-tracking networks, bio-terrorism and public health. Presenters at the community forums not only include Center Investigators, but also invited guest speakers from the NIH, NIEHS, Tennessee and Metropolitan Nashville Departments of Health, the Tennessee Environmental Council, American Lung Association and others have provided presentations at the forums. The forums primarily have been held at Vanderbilt University; however, by partnering with community organizations, many of the forums have been held at off campus locales such as the public library and Cumberland Science Museum.

## **Community Outreach and Education in Environmental Health**

The UW-Milwaukee COEP is focused on community education at various levels. It is also evolving and developing within the context of a university that is designated as the urban university within the University of Wisconsin-System. This has meant, for example, that the Center leadership has been able to propose and get university funding to establish an Institute of Environmental Health (IEH). The Institute, with the MFBS Center as its cornerstone, is explicitly called to work at the interface of urban environmental and public health.

Problems of environmental and public health that affect city residents inherently require an interdisciplinary approach. We have been fortunate to have a wealth of colleagues in the social sciences who can work with us on problems that combine social and scientific dimensions. Thus, in our project to provide the Hmong population with effective communication about the issues related to the consumption of substantial amounts of locally caught fish, it was imperative that the scientific content be couched in ways that would effectively reach or communicate with the Hmong community. So, we partnered with a university expert in mass communication, who has done research with the Hmong community, as well as a film maker with extensive experience in filming urban issues. In addition, we included a member of the Center for Urban Initiatives and Research to handle the evaluative aspect of the work. Equally as important, we are working with a major inner city health center, which provides health services for the Hmong in their native tongue and has firm ties to the leadership of this community. Finally, the ultimate success of this effort has depended upon forming a trust-worthy relationship with a Hmong leader who could serve as an intermediary between the university and health center members and an advisory group of Hmong leaders, who guided and critically assessed the progress in making a film about fish consumption specifically for this community.

The partnership between the Center and the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center has led to other initiatives related to the prevention of lead poisoning in Milwaukee children, an assessment of asthma morbidity, and support for studies of the origin of pathogenic bacteria that have caused persistent beach closings in the city. In each case, the Center's long experience with these problems served as a practical starting point for considering what expertise the MFBS Center and Institute (IEH) could bring to bear on these problems, and, thus, what actual problems could be addressed.

The existence of the Institute (IEH) has opened the opportunity to work with the State Bureau of Environmental Health, as well as the Milwaukee Health Department. As partners in an environmental health capacity building grant from CDC, both sides have quickly recognized how much ignorance there has been about our respective activities and capabilities. For example, we were unaware that the State had received a very large grant in the area of bioterrorism; its representatives were equally uninformed that the University had just been funded by DARPA to establish a Center for Water Security. Both groups are committed to full, routine communication and to working together.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Building Lasting Partnerships across Ethnically and Socially Diverse Communities.**

***Johnnye Lewis, Ph.D., DABT  
Director, COEP and Community Environmental Health Program,  
University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center***

New Mexico is a multi-ethnic state with the majority of the population composed of the combined minorities of Native Americans from more than 21 tribes, Hispanic descendants of the original conquistadors, and much more recent Latino immigrants from Mexico and Latin America. Environmental concerns encompass three National Laboratories and military bases responsible for the development and stewardship of the atomic arsenal, a national radioactive waste repository, and the legacy of extensive uranium and other mine-related insults. These high-tech concerns are juxtaposed on a state that is historically agricultural, remains primarily rural, and is continually ranked as one of the 3 poorest and most poorly educated states in the nation. Disparities in health outcomes are evidenced throughout the diversity of populations in the prevalence of chronic diseases such as asthma and diabetes, as well as in the differential prevalence of various cancers of unknown etiology. This unique setting has forced the Community Environmental Health Program at the University of New Mexico to build lasting partnerships to address environmental health concerns within these diverse communities. Although many of the partnerships have resulted in trusting relationships continuing to develop research initiatives, all sides along the way have learned many difficult lessons. The presentation will focus on general principles that have evolved to guide the program. Lasting relationships, as well as frustrations and rewards of taking research out of the laboratory and into the community will be discussed from both the community and research perspectives. Finally, the newest phase of involving other scientists from not only the NIEHS Center, but from the Cancer and Asthma Centers will be discussed in the context of efforts to drive basic research to address community needs.

## **NIEHS Public Interest Liaison Group (PILG)**

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) has long recognized the important role that laypersons must play in helping to identify and define environmental health threats to the public. The NIEHS Public Interest Liaison Group (PILG) provides an opportunity for the public to have a voice in environmental health research. Members of the PILG represent a wide variety of interests and are essential for bringing important matters of public interest forward for discussion with the Director and his senior staff. The PILG is also an important forum for increasing public understanding of the NIEHS, its research agenda, and its programs and policies.

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The American Lung Association of Washington (ALAW) was founded in 1906 and is the oldest health organization in the state of Washington. The mission of ALAW is to assure lung health for the people of Washington through research, education, community service, and advocacy. Our goals include reducing tobacco use, particularly among young people; preventing and controlling air pollution; and funding education and research to help people with asthma or other lung disease. Some American Lung Association of Washington's public policy items:

Tobacco	Lung Disease	Air Quality
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure appropriate funding, including tobacco settlement funds go towards education and enforcement relating to minors and tobacco use.</li> <li>2. Increase taxes on tobacco products.</li> <li>3. Restrict or eliminate smoking in public places, including workplaces.</li> <li>4. Restrict or eliminate advertising and promotion of tobacco products.</li> <li>5. Restrict minors' access to tobacco.</li> <li>6. Support a ban on free samples of tobacco products.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure favorable public policies to eliminate lung disease caused by exposure to workplace health hazards.</li> <li>2. Monitor public policies impacting persons with lung disease.</li> <li>3. Ensure access to quality health care services for all individuals affected by lung disease.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support indoor air pollution legislation, including comprehensive federal legislation, radon control, and hazardous substances acts.</li> <li>2. Fight weakening amendments to the Clean Air Washington Act.</li> <li>3. Ensure that air quality is adequate to protect the health of the most sensitive members of the public.</li> <li>4. Emphasize prevention of air pollution.</li> </ol>

The American Lung Association of Washington welcomes you to our Legislative Advocacy Network, known as LegNet. As individuals, we often have little influence over the decisions made on our behalf in Olympia. But together, we can have a strong voice to encourage the critical issues that affect us all: sound public policies to fight tobacco use, educate and ensure quality health care for those with lung diseases like asthma and COPD, and promote air quality through our Washington State legislators and representatives.

Our success in achieving these objectives depends on the number of people we can get involved in the legislative process. Your involvement makes a tremendous difference. Each active LegNet member gets us one step closer to our goals.

What can one person do to help?

Become part of LegNet. The Legislative Advocacy Network, or LegNet, is a group of volunteers who support the mission of the American Lung Association of Washington and are dedicated to encouraging sound political policies that protect the health of Washington state citizens. Our concerns have a right to be heard. Together, we have a voice in Olympia.

How does LegNet work?

As a LegNet member, you will receive a legislative manual with information and tips for effectively contacting your policy makers, legislative updates, and Action Alerts that will inform you of the crucial issues before our representatives in Olympia and how we can act collectively to make a difference.

**The Role of COEP's in Providing Scientific Advice to the Government  
NYU-NIEHS Environmental Health Sciences Center  
New York University School of Medicine**

A basic COEP objective is to provide a mechanism whereby interactions between the community and scientists can occur, with the underlying goal of improving environmental health. In fact, COEPs are in a unique position to interface with government to help improve public policy decision-making. One especially effective avenue to accomplish this objective is to provide an impartial scientific resource on environmental health issues to decision-makers, such as by providing testimony before government committees at the city, state or federal level. In this presentation, our COEP's past experience in testifying before the U.S. Congress will be described and discussed. The talk will provide examples, highlighting how we at the NYU-NIEHS Environmental Health Sciences Center have gotten involved in this governmental process in the past, and will specifically aim to provide some useful strategies/recommendations/lessons learned that may be useful to other COEPs in achieving more activity in this area.

*Abstract*

**COEPS AND POLICY CONUNDRUMS**

Frances M. Lynn, Dr.P.H.  
COEP Director, Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility,  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

One of the responsibilities that NIEHS gives its COEPs is to communicate Center research findings in order to improve public health policy. Over the past few years, the UNC-CH COEP staff and students, who also serve as the outreach unit of the UNC-CH's Superfund Basic Research Program, have investigated (using focus groups, case studies and interviews) how best to use Center science to inform policy. On the positive side, we found scientists willing to work in the policy arena, government officials eager to be brought up-to-date on applicable and cutting edge science, and COEPS and other public health outreach units using innovative effective mechanisms to facilitate conversations between scientists and policymakers. However, our investigations also uncovered a number of conundrums that make the translation of research findings into policy challenging, including: the nature of the science (basic, exploratory and uncertain); the reluctance of many scientists to go beyond their data and to engage in policy deliberations, and; the highly unpredictable and politicized nature of the environmental policy process itself.

**COEP interactions**  
**NIEHS – Liam O’Fallon and Karalyn Colopy**

During this session we will discuss ways to increase and enhance existing COEP collaborations. As participants will observe at the poster session, the Resource Center recently designed a COEP booth for use at regional and national meetings. The purpose and process for using this booth will be discussed in greater detail during this session. We have identified several conferences that COEPs usually attend, but we’d like to identify other potential conferences to expand awareness of COEP. Finally, we will discuss the possibility of smaller, subject-specific COEP meetings (e.g. K-12, health care providers, community partnerships, etc.) to enhance interactions of COEPs with that particular focus.