

Managing Editor's Desk

Nelson Fabian, M.S.



The Emergence of Environmental Health in Land Use Planning

For years, many in our profession have argued for expansive definitions of environmental health. This large segment of our professional community sees environmental health as encompassing virtually anything in the environment that could impact human health. If you are disposed to thinking of our profession in that way, then *this Journal issue is especially for you!*

In this issue, we feature four articles on the fascinating topic of land use planning/design and environmental health. Land use planning isn't exactly the type of topic that one is prone to find in the daily conversations that most NEHA members have. Yet the relationship between the design of a community (and its "built environment") and human health has been drawing more and more attention lately. We now know that depending on how a community is designed, a wide variety of human health patterns are possible.

Knowing this, NEHA was able to obtain funding support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Environmental Health (CDC/NCEH) that enabled us to team up with the International City/County Management Association to examine four distinct examples of how four very different communities were infusing their land use planning with environmental health considerations. The objective of this effort has been to use these case studies to educate environmental health professionals and local government managers about how health goals can be advanced through land use and design planning and decision making.

As a part of this project, NEHA is publishing in this month's *Journal* illuminating descriptions of how these four communities found a way to involve environmental health

Environmental health truly does reach and touch an almost limitless number of community concerns.

in their land use planning programs, and how the communities have changed as a result of this more coordinated approach. We hope that readers will both learn from these stories and discover insights that will help to accomplish similar kinds of coordination in many more communities throughout the country.

To further our goal of getting the word out on this topic, we will also be posting these four studies online at our Web site (www.neha.org).

To give you just a feel for the reading pleasure that lies ahead, you should know that the four case studies highlight exceptional or creative solutions used by local governments to incorporate environmental health considerations into land use planning and design. The four health departments that we studied are as follows:

- Tri-County Health Department—three suburban counties surrounding Denver;
- Ingham County Health Department—the Lansing, Michigan, area;
- Seattle and King County, Washington; and
- Delaware County Health Department—near Columbus, Ohio.

To whet your reading appetite, let me note just a few things about each story.

Tri-County environmental health staff are now involved in land use planning. They want to bring four principles into this region's land use planning work: protect against environmental hazards, prevent the spread of disease, prevent illness and injury, and encourage healthy behaviors.

Ingham County environmental health staff helped to develop an innovative "Health Impact Assessment" tool which they now incorporate into that county's land use planning. The effort in this county began after surveys indicated a negative trend in the area's health status.

Seattle and King County identified "the built environment and health" as one of its top three strategic directions way back in 2004. In response to questions about why the environmental health staff is involved in this issue, it is noted that data from the area supports the contention that residents from "walkable" communities are more physically active and less overweight, breathe cleaner air, and lead healthier lifestyles.

Delaware County is the fastest growing county in Ohio and the 11th fastest growing county in the nation. The development of this community's built environment is therefore happening very rapidly. The environmental health program there has been working to stay ahead of the curve. They have surveyed residents to gain an understanding of their environmental concerns. The environmental issues that were identified were also then linked to human health implications. These insights have informed the environmental health input that goes into that area's land use planning.

continued on page 49

aligning desirable goals like reductions in greenhouse gasses with critical public health goals.

Are We Ready? Preparing for the Public Health Challenges of Climate Change is the first nationally representative survey to assess the perceptions and activities of local public health directors regarding climate change and public health. One hundred and thirty-three local health department directors from across the country answered

a series of questions meant to assess their perceptions of climate change and its potential public health effects, their communities' level of preparedness for the health impacts of climate change, their current activities to prevent or mitigate climate change, and their opinions on necessary resources to best address climate change.

The full report is available at www.edf.org/arewoready.

Environmental Health-'Net



CDC Partners with NSPF® to Create Crypto Outbreak Alert System

www.nspf.org/Cryptotoolkit.html

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Swimming Pool Foundation® (NSPF®) have established a *Cryptosporidium* (Crypto) outbreak alert system to help aquatic facilities protect their patrons from recreational water illness. During the past two decades, Crypto has become recognized as one of the most common causes of waterborne disease (recreational water and drinking water) in the U.S. CDC and NSPF encourage other organizations to disseminate the outbreak alert to their contacts as well. Readers should visit www.nspf.org/Cryptotoolkit.html and sign up to receive alerts. They can also download and review the toolkit of available materials to prepare for or to prevent or limit outbreaks.

The system is relatively simple. It focuses on building awareness of the risk and presenting prevention strategies. When CDC and NSPF learn of an outbreak, NSPF will broadcast a regional email. NSPF will also send alerts to national and regional organizations who request to be notified of any outbreak. Toolkits are posted both at the CDC and NSPF Web sites.



Water Management is the Focus of Infiltrator Systems New Web Site

www.infiltratorsystems.com

Infiltrator Systems recently announced the launch of its new Web site. Water plays a prominent role throughout the new site, connecting Infiltrator Systems's evolution as a water management company with its ongoing focus on excellence in wastewater treatment.

The Infiltrator Web site provides up-to-date information on Infiltrator's expanding product lines. Installers, distributors, engineers, regulators, and consumers can all find extensive onsite septic system and product information tailored to their needs.

The Web site also includes easy access to the Aquaworx by Infiltrator Web site. Aquaworx offers advanced solutions for the onsite wastewater industry with the Intelligent Pump Control (IPC) Panel and Aquaworx Remediator™. The goal of Aquaworx is to elevate the acceptance of advanced onsite wastewater solutions by leveraging the sales and distribution network with new cutting-edge technologies. 🐼

Managing Editor's Desk

continued from page 74

For further context for these articles, I would also refer you to CDC's introduction to this material, which can be found with the articles themselves.

Way back when (!), I began my professional career as an urban planner. I can vouch for the fact that back then, you couldn't find in the planning literature virtually anything about the health implications of our work. Instead, everything was focused on cost-effectiveness, rationale growth, and matching urban infrastructure to the needs of growing communities.

To see how this has evolved and to see environmental health now at the forefront in exerting influence on how we design our communities and our built environments for the sake of health goals demonstrates three lessons. First, it shows how a professional field can grow in ways that further benefit humanity. Second, it shows what can be accomplished when we all work together. Finally, it shows (yet again) the pervasiveness of the topic that we have chosen for our professional careers. Environmental health truly does reach and touch an almost limitless number of community concerns.

I began by implying that expansive definitions of environmental health had merit. I will end by noting that these four stories clearly show that there are no limits to what environmental health can accomplish when seen as the expansive field of practice that it is.

Special thanks to Karen Roof and Susan Jerles for managing this project for us. Special thanks also to the environmental health professionals in these four communities we studied, for leading the way. 🐼