

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Binational Tracking Network of Environmentally Related Diseases

Start Date: October 2004 Completion Date: 2005

Introduction/Background

This project addresses the information gap on diseases associated with environmental causes throughout the Chihuahua-New Mexico-Texas Border Region by establishing a pilot program to collect data in El Paso, Sunland Park, and Ciudad Juarez, create an inclusive committee to set criteria for the various classes of environmental diseases, and analyze results to see if links can be established between environmental quality and disease. The first phase of the pilot program considers only respiratory-based diseases. The second phase of this program will include gastro-intestinal data.

Project Description/Purpose

The project seeks to improve public knowledge and understanding of the relationship between air and water quality and the aforementioned diseases. While the pilot project is limited in scope, it will initiate a tracking network to provide comprehensive data of diseases and their relationship to environmental conditions. This project is designed to provide common criteria and methodology for the U.S. / Mexico border region on disease tracking and data reporting. Among the most widely mentioned issues regarding the development of disease tracking networks is the difficulty in developing compatible databases. This project will attempt to remove that barrier.

Expected Outcomes

- The goal of this project is to develop an Environmental Health Tracking Network to provide comprehensive data of respiratory diseases and their relationship to environmental conditions.
- This project will establish a binational/transborder pilot project designed to improve the capacity to register, monitor, conduct surveillance, and research respiratory diseases and their possible relation with exposure to ambient air.
- The project seeks to improve public knowledge and understanding of the relationship between degraded air quality and the impact on human health.
- It will be designed to provide a common methodology for reporting respiratory health information in the U.S. - México border region.
- The project's methodology seeks to integrate information obtained from local hospitals, clinics, and health care providers with air quality data reported by government agencies on both sides of the U.S. – México border responsible for regional air quality monitoring.

Progress

- A domain name has been registered and website developed to report data obtained for the Tracking Network Project. The website established for this project is <http://www.infofrontera.org/btnerd> . This website will provide information on GIS maps, publications, current air quality conditions, and other parameters collected for the project. The website has been established in both English and Spanish.
- This project will establish the first binational level of cooperation for the reporting of air quality related disease along the entire U.S.-México border. Continued cooperation over the duration of this project and on into future years will indicate binational cooperation is possible between a U.S. public sector organization and a México-based private sector organization in regards the sharing of hospital admissions data.

- Air quality data has been obtained for all three cities in the three-state region
 - Hospital data has been submitted by FEMAP in an ethically-approved manner
 - Hospital data has been submitted by Thomason Hosp in a manner which complies with HIPAA data reporting guidelines.
- This project will be the first tracking network for the state of Texas and may establish a standardized method of reporting health based data to the public while protecting privacy concerns outlined by HIPPA.
 - The proposed methodology for reporting health-based patient information has been positively received.
 - This project has shown that the methodology of placing a grid over a region where grid-cells measure 4 square meters is feasible and facilitates data reporting in a binational format.
 - Project partners became aware of a Tracking network project funded for the City of Houston. However, the spatial region for reporting health information is different between the two projects.

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