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Northeast Environmental and Public Health Laboratory Directors (NEEPHLD) – Almost A Half Century of Partnership

Jack Bennett, Christine Bean, Onesia Bishop, Mary Celotti, John Fontana, Ewa King, Michael Pentella, Kenneth Pote, Oscar Pancorbo, Jennifer Rakeman, Jill Taylor

INTRODUCTION

One of the goals of the Laboratory Efficiencies Initiative (LEI) is to improve the collection of and access to public health test service information required for decision making, planning, and collaboration with state and local public health laboratories (PHL). The NEEPHLD Group has been in existence for almost 50 years and embodies the principles of the LEI.

History

In the mid-1970s, newborn screening legislation was introduced in the New England states. The Public Health Laboratory Directors recognized problems and concerns common to each of them and began to meet regularly to brainstorm and troubleshoot solutions. Since the region covered is relatively small, the meetings were able to occur on a regular basis. This group became the New England Public Health Laboratory Directors Group (NEPHLD).

Those initial meetings were so valuable that the group decided to expand the focus of their activities to include other functions of the Public Health Laboratory. Since each state also had an environmental laboratory either co-located or closely associated with the public health laboratory the second “E” was formally added to the group in the 1980’s. The membership expanded to include New York State and the EPA Region 1 Laboratory thus creating the Northeast Environmental and Public Health Laboratory Directors Group (NEEPHLD).

As NEEPHLD evolved, the group began to meet more formally on a quarterly basis. Because of its central location, the majority of the meetings were held at the New Hampshire Public Health Laboratories. Over time, the meeting location shifted, with the host lab rotating to other states.

NEEPHLD agenda items cover topics including quality assurance, emergency response and preparedness, laboratory regulations, billing, procurement, and facilities issues.

In recent years one meeting has been dedicated to a training event, inviting other regional partners outside of the NEEPHLD group. Training topics have included radioanalytical testing of both clinical and environmental samples, and development of a plan for continuity of operations in an emergency.

In 2013, CDC released a funding opportunity to investigate shared laboratory services. NEEPHLD invited New Jersey and New York City to join and submitted a proposal which was accepted. A Consortium was formed that meets in conjunction with the core group quarterly and holds monthly conference calls to develop a shared services model for the region.


NEEPHLD Partners Key Statistics

Maine




Public Health/Environmental/Forensic Laboratory
58,000 clinical tests per year
83,000 environmental tests per year
56 FTE's
Population Served: 1,328,361
Square miles: 30,842

New Hampshire




Public Health/Environmental Laboratory
17,000 clinical tests per year
71,000 environmental tests per year
64 FTEs
Population Served: 1,316,469
Square miles: 8,952

Vermont




Public Health/Environmental Laboratory
36,000 clinical tests per year
38,000 environmental tests per year
44 FTE's
Population Served: 625,745
Square miles: 9,216

Massachusetts



Public Health/Environmental Laboratory
225,000 clinical tests per year
15,000 environmental tests per year
127 FTE's
Population Served: 6,646,144
Square miles: 10,554


Massachusetts DEP Laboratory



Environmental Laboratory
13,000 environmental tests per year
22 FTE's
Population Served: 6,646,144
Square miles: 10,554


NEEPHLD Partners Key Statistics

Connecticut




Public Health/Environmental Laboratory
120,000 clinical tests per year
41,000 environmental tests per year
90 FTE's
Population Served: 3,574,097
Square miles: 4,842

Rhode Island




Public Health/Environmental/Forensic Laboratory
93,000 clinical tests per year
35,000 environmental tests per year
73 FTE's
Population Served: 1,052,567
Square miles: 1,033

New York State




Public Health/Environmental Laboratory
373,000 clinical tests per year
120,000 environmental tests per year
686 FTE's
Population Served: 19,378,105
Square miles: 47,126

New York City




Public Health/Environmental Laboratory
150,000 clinical tests per year
3,200 environmental tests per year
135 FTE's
Population Served: 8,175,133
Square miles: 302

New Jersey



Public Health/Environmental/Agricultural Laboratory
5,300,000 clinical tests per year
19,000 environmental tests per year
155 FTE's
Population Served: 8,791,894
Square miles: 7,354

EPA Region 1



Environmental Laboratory
12,500 environmental tests per year
22 FTE's
Population Served: 14,444,868
Square miles: 62,685

NEEPHLD Activities

- Serves as a resource for new Laboratory Directors in the region
- Developed a comprehensive Regional Emergency Response Plan in conjunction with EPA
- Participated in first multi-state exercise involving environmental and human clinical samples
- COOP planning
- Developed analytical methods for both environmental and clinical matrices
- Shared costing information and reviewed financial approaches to meeting budgets
- Coordinated grant submissions for biomonitoring and data exchange
- Shared job descriptions
- Provided forum for scientific staff to meet and share methods and train on high complexity methods
- Shared LIMS implementation strategies and experiences
- Hosted EPA Regional activities, and served as a forum for EPA to provide training when Drinking Water Compliance methods were initially released (1980's)
- Discussed legislative issues that could affect multiple states
- Shared analytical services (Connecticut served as a regional resource for asbestos testing in drinking water)
- Applied for and received EPA waivers on methods and detection limits more specific to New England needs

CONCLUSION

For almost 50 years, NEEPHLD (the first group of its kind in the nation) has been a resource to the region and has served as a forum to help new laboratory directors develop the skills to effectively perform their jobs. The NEEPHLD members share information and challenges to develop joint solutions for problems that arise and can serve as a resource and model for laboratories as they work towards the concepts of sustainability.

Acknowledgements / Sources

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Reference: Population & Square mileage, US Census Bureau, 2010

For More Information

Jack Bennett (jack.bennett@ct.gov)