

EDITORIAL

INCORPORATING PUBLIC HEALTH PERSPECTIVES INTO ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

by Larry J. Gordon

The issue of "incorporating public health perspectives into environmental policy" should be confined to the concerns of the field of environmental health science and protection. This makes the task comparatively easy and simple. To extend it beyond that to wilderness areas, estuaries, game and fish management, etc., makes the task somewhat implausible.

The field of environmental health science and protection includes those environmental factors such as air, food, water, wastes, toxic chemicals and radiation which adversely impact on human health or ecological balances. All agencies administering such environmental health science and protection programs having health goals are public health agencies, whatever their titles. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that every level of government has many public health agencies, regardless of formal titles. All such agencies are administering programs with health standards and regulations statutorily based on public health. Most of these agencies are at least partially staffed by qualified environmental health science and protection professionals as well as other essential personnel such as geologists, biologists, chemists, toxicologists, and engineers. Some agencies include such traditional public health support functions as epidemiology and risk assessment as well. Some are viewed as primarily regulatory while others have functions of planning, assessment, public policy development and assurance.

The public health community should be realistic, recognize the foregoing facts and realize that most of our nation's federal and state environmental health science and protection efforts take place outside the agencies formally designated as "health departments." To better incorporate public health perspectives into such agencies and environmental health science and protection policies, public health professionals must:

- 1. Accept, communicate, embrace, and join forces with all the various environmental health science and protection agencies.**
- 2. Understand that public health and the environment can be served as well or better by agencies separate from health care organizations.**
- 3. Ensure that schools of public health and graduate environmental health science and protection programs produce personnel possessing the essential competencies to serve in such agencies. Targeted continuing education is also essential.**
- 4. Participate in and constructively impact public policy regarding environmental health science and protection.**
- 5. Help ensure that lead environmental health science and protection agencies are comprehensive in scope; staffed by appropriate professionals; that they have programs prioritized on the basis of sound epidemiology, toxicology, and risk assessment; and that they have adequate legal, fiscal, and laboratory resources to be effective.**

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