

Protocol for Assessing Community  
Excellence in Environmental Health  
*(PACE EH)*



NATIONAL  
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## *PROTOCOL FOR ASSESSING COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE IN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH (PACE EH)*

Florida is experiencing unprecedented growth, adding the pressure of 750 people every day to its schools, highways, water supplies, and open space. Pockets of existing communities risk being forgotten or receiving a disparate level of services as new communities are developed. New communities are likely to extend urban sprawl and foment associated public health needs. As researchers and communities become increasingly aware of the myriad links between environmental quality, human health, and the built environment, urbanization triggers an increased need for core environmental health programs and services.

State and local agencies' programmatic and funding structure may hamper efforts to provide assistance to communities by unnecessarily fragmenting services thereby missing the health needs of the community as a whole. A consistent process and set of expectations needs to be established to allow for environmental health to directly influence communities and planning decisions. Environmental health and public health programs and services should be defined in more holistic interdisciplinary terms.

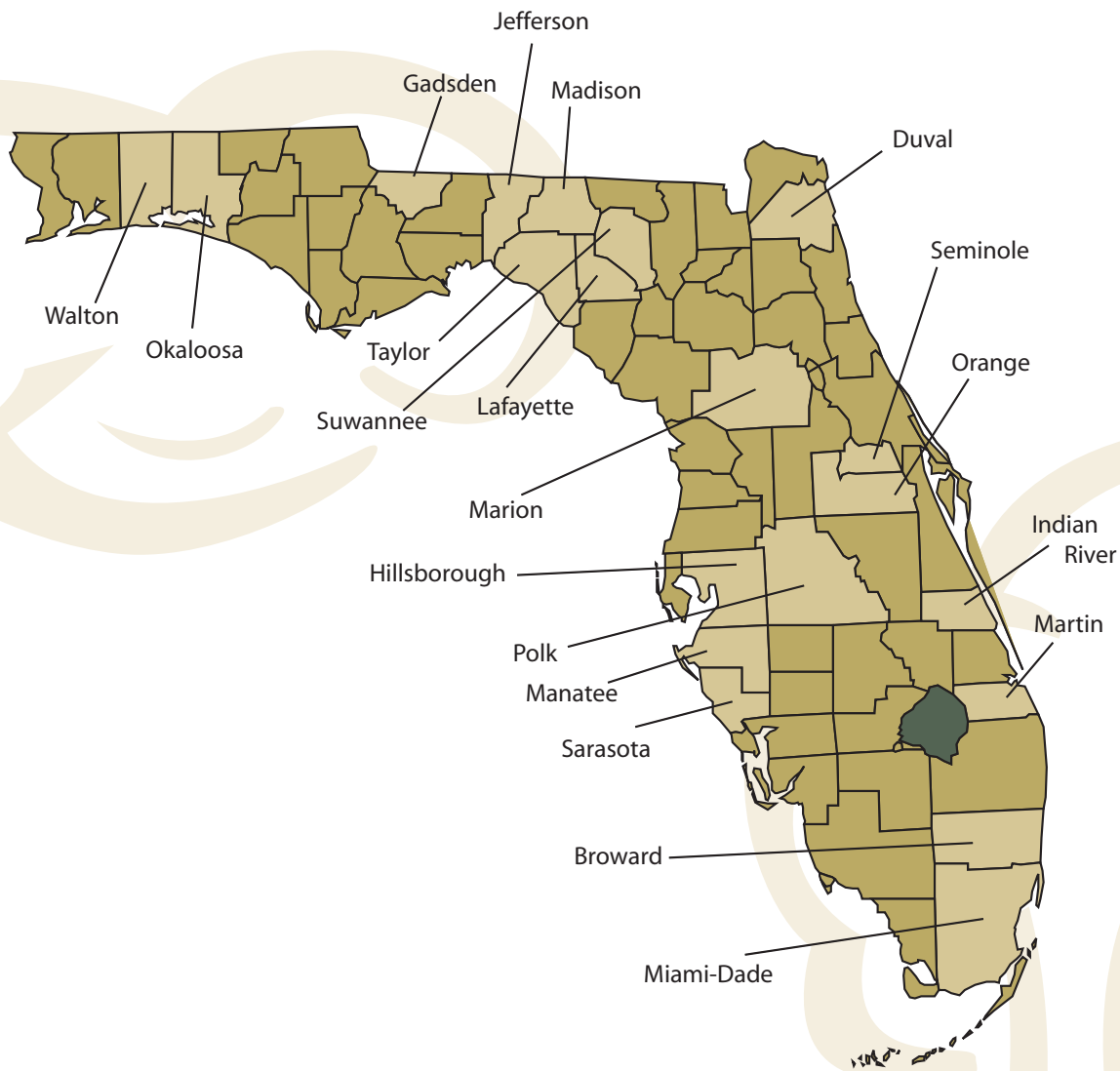
The Florida Department of Health is strategically and financially supporting use of the *PACE EH* process at the local level to achieve this objective. The goals of using the *PACE EH* tool include:

- ▶ promoting improved communication between environmental health professionals and their communities;
- ▶ addressing outstanding environmental health issues;
- ▶ empowering communities to express and define their environmental health issues; and
- ▶ inspiring long-term community-based environmental health interventions.

The Division of Environmental Health supplied start-up grants to county health departments for community assessment projects in 21 counties. Most have chosen to make use of the methodology described in *Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH)*. Early results indicate a strong need to closely examine the way we build, develop, and service our communities and the associated impacts on our public health. They further demonstrate the efficacy for doing so through strategic application of the *PACE EH* methodology.

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The division has provided just under \$600,000 in grants during 2003-04 and 2004-05 to establish the *PACE EH* process in 20 Florida counties. Participating counties are identified below on the map:



Although some of the projects do not follow the *PACE EH* methodology explicitly, all are designed to open the lines of communication between the departments' county health agencies and the communities they serve.

The specific grant amounts varied slightly county by county, falling between \$25,000 and \$60,000. Most sites received \$30,000 and were forewarned that the grant was not likely to be renewed and that resulting *PACE EH* initiatives would have to be self-sustaining.

<i>PACE EH</i> County	Florida State Dept. of Health Grant Totals
Broward	\$30,000
Duval	\$25,000
Gadsden	\$30,000
Hillsborough	\$30,000
Indian River	\$30,000
Lafayette and Suwannee	\$60,000
Madison and Jefferson	\$50,000
Manatee	\$30,000
Marion	\$30,000
Martin	\$30,000
Miami-Dade	\$30,000
Okaloosa	\$29,721
Orange	\$28,815
Polk	\$30,000
Putnam	\$20,000
Sarasota	\$29,825
Seminole	\$20,000
Taylor	\$30,000
Walton	\$30,000
<b>Total State <i>PACE EH</i> Grant Expenditures 2003-2005</b>	<b>\$593,361</b>

Brief descriptions of each of the Florida *PACE EH* projects and their status are described below. However, it is important to note that the Florida *PACE EH* sites are relatively “young” in terms of their growth cycle. *PACE EH* is designed to take approximately 18-24 months to complete in its first iteration and many users will not be in a position to evaluate overall health impacts until many years after they complete the project. Most Florida *PACE EH* sites are completing their first *PACE EH* projects, and have yet to begin developing relevant environmental health indicators or prioritizing community-identified environmental health issues. What is possibly most striking is the undeniable value most of the Florida sites have already attributed to their *PACE EH* work. The stories below are clearly success stories, but they are just the beginning. The true impact *PACE EH* will have in Florida has yet to be defined, but it is already impressive.

### **Broward County**

The grant provided the means to perform a community-based environmental assessment and educational program in the Collier City subdivision of Pompano Beach, Broward County. This area has a number of environmental risk factors that may affect the residents' health. Some of the environmental health issues that are likely to be addressed are animal vectors, solid waste disposal, failing septic systems, and housing.

Efforts to date have centered on promoting the *PACE EH* initiative and establishing partnerships with community "gatekeepers." Local community development and resource personnel have been recruited to serve on the *PACE EH* assessment team.

*PACE EH* facilitators attended the Collier City Library, Back to School Health Fair to speak to young people about community issues.

Members of the Collier City Home Owners Association and employees of the Pompano Beach community development board, and local faith-based organizations will be invited to join the assessment team.

*PACE EH* facilitators are working with Broward Department of Health, Health Education Outreach Division to present a workshop on HIV/teen pregnancy and facilitate a grant writing workshop.

### **Duval County**

In response to the growing number of environmental and human health concerns associated with the discovery of several dumpsites around Duval County, the City of Jacksonville, and the Duval County Health Department (DCHD) created the Citizens Health Advisory Council, Inc. (CHAC) in August 1999. CHAC is an independent citizens group that represents non-governmental entities, such as the Citizens Planning and Action Committee, the International Epidemiology Institute, the N.A.A.C.P., the Sierra Club, Jacksonville University, Edward Waters College, University of North Florida, and the Jacksonville Urban League. CHAC, Inc.

The DCHD obtained a *PACE EH* grant to conduct a community needs assessment. The CHAC identified a critical need to educate physicians on environmental hazards. The DCHD has partnered with area hospitals and academic institutions to communicate the need for local physicians to be educated on the vital roles that environmental health professionals play in preventing disease. While conducting these educational sessions, it became evident that this type of training would be beneficial to physicians in several other counties within the state.

The Duval County Health Department will conduct specialized Environmental Medicine training and education for physicians in Hillsborough and Miami-Dade counties by providing an overview of their roles in preventing disease and safeguarding public health. Future training topics will include pediatric environmental medicine, hazardous waste sites, West Nile virus, bioterrorism and water and food borne outbreaks.

A group of area physicians have assessed the need and developed strategies for implementing the Environmental Medicine Training. The training will be offered in a "Grand Round" setting to area physicians, nurses, and other staff with medical backgrounds.

More work should be done to establish relationships with the universities in Tampa to implement trainings outside the health department. The environmental medicine training pediatric residents in Miami-Dade County receive will be modeled after a similar program in Jacksonville. Discussions

are also underway to establish ongoing trainings for the rotation of physician residents. Advanced education credits have been established for participants who attend the trainings.

### **Gadsden County**

Gadsden County is using *PACE EH* funding to continue addressing the existing Gadsden Community Health Council's objectives of coordinating health care resources, initiating a strategic planning process with community needs assessments, and addressing barriers caused by isolation, language, literacy, cultural and racial disparities. *PACE EH* will help the community to understand environmental health issues with regard to laws, regulations, and roles in the community.

The health agency has hired a *PACE EH* project coordinator and an Environmental Health Leadership Team has been formed and is assisting in steering the project. The team contains more local environmental health experts than had been envisioned, but community members have been recruited to make the team a more representative body. Fact sheets and flyers were developed in part to broaden the base of team members and project volunteers.

Initial team meetings indicated that priority issues may include water quality, with a specific focus on deep wells and hazardous waste disposal. The team is reaching out to local media in to promote *PACE EH* activities and provide a regular venue for community environmental health education, which is another assessment team priority.

The assessment team has developed and is distributing community environmental health perception strategically around the county, to such places as county health departments, clinics, and local government offices (or local centers of government). The assessment team is organizing an environmental clean up "task force." The team intends to collaborate in this initiative with county code enforcement officials, possibly by establishing a periodic "Neighborhood Clean Up Day."

### **Hillsborough County**

This *PACE EH* project is designed to strengthen a network of community partners' ability to address widespread environmental health issues and identify the critical needs of their highly-populated county.

The health agency facilitators organized a recruitment drive to recruit volunteers from the community to serve on the assessment team. They promoted the value of the project, and fostered allegiance among the assessment team through their LEGACY campaign.

### **PACE EH LEGACY TEAM EXPECTATIONS:**

- ▶ **L**ong-term commitment to completing the *PACE EH* process
- ▶ **E**agerness to see positive changes in environmental health through use of community initiated participation
- ▶ **G**enuine concern for the community's environmental health
- ▶ **A**cknowledgement of the community's ability to solve its environmental health issues
- ▶ **C**onsistent attendance at and participation in community meetings
- ▶ **Y**earning for a healthy, safe and successful future

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“LEGACY” represents the county’s *PACE EH* process, which focuses on empowering communities to develop short and long-term environmental health plans. A legacy of community empowerment and cooperation between concerned individuals and governmental organizations allowed for facilitated problem solving of environmental health issues.

Four *PACE EH* meetings have been held to date and the assessment team is working through Task 5. It has collected approximately 90 surveys of the more than 350 that were distributed. The team delivered surveys to a variety of community gathering points such as the GED and ESOL classes, several civic associations, the local economic council, and the community development corporation. The team intends to develop action plans to address the top five priority issues identified in the community surveys.

Discussions during meetings indicate a high degree of community interest in local brownfields redevelopment, and the need to identify additional contamination sites. Areas of potential contamination in Palm River will be investigated by members of the *PACE EH* team, based on recommendations from residents.

The *PACE EH* LEGACY team is also focusing on establishing collaborative efforts with Hillsborough County’s varied community associations, and grass roots organizations.

### **Indian River**

The Indian River County Health Department is using the *PACE EH* process to conduct environmental health assessments and public education campaigns to generate needed improvements such as potable water supplies, functioning sewage treatment systems and sanitary facilities in Wabasso - a disadvantaged, predominantly minority community in the county. Notably, the Indian River *PACE EH* project is also proving to be an extremely effective community mobilizer, and has established the assessment team members as locally visible media-savvy advocates for improved housing conditions in Wabasso.

Early *PACE EH* meetings revealed a great deal of community interest, attracting local decision makers and more than 100 people to the general information sessions. Sub-par housing, poor public lighting, and access to safe public water were predominant issues reflected in both in the meetings and in community survey results. Concerned citizens, local government officials, and representatives of public works agencies also attended. Open communication in a neutral setting led to discussion, acceptance and implementation of necessary and immediate remedies.

At Indian River, that was just the tip of the iceberg. Over the past six months, the *PACE EH* project coordinators and volunteers have been instrumental in connecting Wabasso to the public water system (including approval of the necessary \$11,300 budget), raising funds to develop a new Wabasso community center and in building new sidewalks. The *PACE EH* team has helped to develop a coalition of local volunteers called Project Hope, to build homes for disadvantaged residents whose housing needs to be demolished for reasons of safety.

There has also been an inordinate amount of media coverage of *PACE EH* activities in Indian River. The role the project team played in inspiring Project Hope and acquiring improved housing for disadvantaged residents has been well documented in the local and state press, and serves to both promote team activities and inspire increased civic involvement.

The positive media coverage, rapid action planning and immediate impacts is partly the result of, and continues to inspire, broad and committed intra-agency collaboration. The Indian River Health Department *PACE EH* project relies on collaborations with FEMA, local builders, Florida Public Works, the Office of the County Commissioner, Indian River Sheriff's Office, etc. The project facilitator indicates the first year of *PACE EH* work has been an unqualified success, improving hundreds of lives and setting the stage for continued local environmental health improvement for many years to come.

### **Lafayette and Suwannee Counties**

Lafayette and Suwannee counties, which have similar demographics, are using the funding to support collaborative *PACE EH* efforts. Each community is establishing its own *PACE EH* process, but public health officials from both communities are working together to streamline the process and share collective "lessons learned."

They are being guided largely by the *PACE EH* guidebook methodology and are distributing, collect and analyzing community environmental health surveys (Task 5); they have already collected more than 200 of them. Coordinators from both districts report widespread community involvement and confidence that *PACE EH* is involving key community leaders and will have significant environmental health impacts in the near future.

The community of Wellborn, in Suwannee County, will serve as a pilot site for exploratory focus group activities that "flesh out" information gathered through the initial round of surveys.

### **Madison and Jefferson Counties**

Facilitators from both county Health Departments are working together to manage the *PACE EH* process. The first year has been devoted to completing the initial five tasks of the methodology, and developing a comprehensive public awareness campaign. The public awareness campaign is focused on educating residents and visitors about the role environmental health plays in the community and promoting public health and disease prevention. Community members are being encouraged to take active leadership roles in this educational campaign. The proposed project comprises Tasks 1 through 5 of the *PACE EH* process, and will be coordinated with an ongoing MAPP Process, a complimentary NACCHO methodology that proscribes broader public health interventions than does *PACE EH*, focusing on the entirety of a given community's public health system, including local hospitals, hospices, rehabilitation centers, etc.

Team meetings to date have established a significant scope of work, including:

- ▶ Developing a demographic profile of Jefferson and Madison Counties
- ▶ Examining the socioeconomic indicators for the counties
- ▶ Analyzing the health status indicators for the two communities
  - ▶ Maternal and child health
  - ▶ Communicable diseases
  - ▶ Morbidity and mortality trends
  - ▶ Health risk behaviors
- ▶ Developing in conjunction with a community advisory group indicators for an environmental health assessment (sample indicators might include rates of septic system failures and rates of gastrointestinal illness)
- ▶ Sharing findings with the communities within each of the counties for the purpose of receiving feedback, a total of four meetings in each county
- ▶ Upon completion of the community health assessment, participate in a final community meeting to prioritize the findings

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The MAPP and *PACE EH* coordinators are also establishing a system for completing the work that was initiated this year through judicious use of local resources and successful local fund-raising efforts.

### **Manatee County**

*PACE EH* work to date has centered on the city of Palmetto, in view of its rapid growth, increasing population density and attendant changing demographics. Initial *PACE EH* assessment team meetings have identified a number of priority environmental health issues, including aging and failing municipal sewer and water systems, storm water management, land use, and community planning.

*PACE EH* funding is also being used to expand a recently developed environmental health education program. The program centers on general education and technical assistance related to water quality issues. It will be made available to residents as well as owners and operators of metered drinking water distribution systems.

### **Marion County**

The funds secured by the Environmental Health Division of the Marion County Health Department are being used to facilitate a community-driven *PACE EH* initiative. This Project - West Ocala Neighborhood *PACE EH* Project - will lead to an assessment and efforts to strategically plan and set priorities to address environmental health concerns. The overarching goal of the project is to impact and improve the quality of life of the West Side community of the city of Ocala.

Despite a brief initial lack of involvement, the West Ocala Neighborhood *PACE EH* Project has developed into a fully operational initiative, gathering much needed support from the grassroots community and several new public agencies and private organizations, including representation from the City's Code Enforcement Office and Fire Department.

The assessment team is hosting a series of workshops to generate an environmental health issue list. The workshops are based on identified community strengths and encourage open discussion in order to translate community perception into a concrete slate of local environmental health issues.

Local media outlets are airing team public service announcements, and a number of assessment team members have been interviewed about the local *PACE EH* process. Such broadcasts are serving to both promote the work of the team, and build community interest and involvement in developing *PACE EH* activities.

An ongoing concern has the need to distinguish environmental health issues from health outcomes that may be somewhat influenced by the community's social environment. It is increasingly evident to the *PACE EH* facilitators that some identified issues are not clearly related to environmental health. Although legitimate and important, these concerns are outside the domain of the assessment team and partners, and are being referred to appropriate agencies, wherever possible.

### **Martin County**

The Martin County Health Department is using the *PACE EH* methodology to work closely with a community in Hobe Sound. The assessment team is conducting a community-based environmental health assessment of this neighborhood to help the community set priorities for action. This grant will foster direct involvement with the community.

The assessment team has identified increased community support for and collaboration on local health agency environmental activities as a primary goal of its *PACE EH* work. This project is still in its formative stages, and, beyond committing to use of the *PACE EH* methodology, has yet to establish specific goals or objectives.

### **Miami-Dade County**

Miami-Dade County Health Department is implementing a *PACE EH* action plan to address various public health risks, including failing septic systems, rodent infestation, lead hazards and solid waste issues.

Efforts to network with members of the West Perrine community have sparked interest from local political leaders. Unfortunately, many key stakeholders are expressing frustration due to the lack of implementation after similar priority setting projects. The assessment team has come to realize that special efforts need to be made to build a better and positive relationship with the community of West Perrine. To meet the needs of the community, the assessment phase will be shortened and more time will be spent in the plan of action phase. Since the community has previously conducted assessment activities similar to *PACE EH*, existing community-based environmental health data is being analyzed, compiled, and utilized accordingly.

To date, the West Perrine Environmental Health Community Project has yet to progress beyond Task Four of the *PACE EH* methodology. They continue to strive toward establishing committed community involvement and participation. They are working with successful *PACE EH* coordinators from Polk County to address community mistrust of health agency activities, a hurdle identified in common at both sites.

### **Okaloosa County**

Okaloosa County Health Department (OCHD) is utilizing *PACE EH* funding to undertake a survey of environmental health concerns in the county. The survey is intended to help identify residents' and visitors' environmental health concerns and how they differed from the health issues identified through state and national health organization' collection of morbidity and mortality statistics .

Upon receiving approval for the project, the assessment facilitators began by establishing a steering committee to coordinate survey activities. This committee initially consisted of representation from OCHD, the Okaloosa County Sheriff's office, the Tourist Development Council, Choctawatchee Bay Alliance, the Economic Development Council, the Okaloosa County Commission Office, and numerous community members representing various ages, and backgrounds, as well as two interns from the University of West Florida Environmental Sciences program.

The Steering Committee's first order of business was to collect and assess data based on reported mortality and morbidity statistics, and establish the intended outcomes of the community survey. Members developed a list of survey questions. They also identified a supporting research methodology with the assistance of the Institute for Senior Professionals, a group of retired business and government professionals with expertise in sampling procedures.

Volunteers and employees of the OCHD are conducting the survey by telephone; questionnaires will be distributed through the Tourist Development Council, and an in-house epidemiologist is responsible for analysis, using newly purchased computer survey design software.

### **Orange County**

The *PACE EH* funding is being used to address county findings that reveal higher than expected childhood asthma caused poor indoor air quality problems in specific local neighborhoods. Project focus includes a media campaign addressing poor indoor air quality as well as childhood lead poisoning prevention. The *PACE EH* team is collaborating with the Orange County Education Committee to provide asthma education in the schools and plans to extend this outreach to the children's homes.

*PACE EH* facilitators are also working with the Office of Neighborhood Affairs to identify and connect with local organizations that may prove beneficial to additional project activities. In addition, they are working closely with *PACE EH* facilitators from Walton County and representatives from the local Healthy Community Initiative in order to learn from their collective work to date, and ensure future collaboration on common goals.

The lack of appropriate medical facilities for the citizens in and around the Parramore community is of particular concern and is likely to become a priority for project sponsored environmental health interventions.

Project activities are being promoted through local radio coverage. Recent topics covered in radio interviews include the Lead Poison Prevention Program and the general environmental health responsibilities of the local public health agency.

### **Polk County**

Polk County has almost completed a disease prevention and environmental health assessment intervention in the Combee Settlement area of Polk County that was initiated through a *PACE EH* grant from NACCHO. Assistance from the Florida Department of Health is being used to jumpstart environmental health educational outreach in an impoverished community in Wahneta, Florida, where many migrant farm workers and Spanish-speaking families live, often without access to basic community or health services.

In Wahneta, the local *PACE EH* facilitator focused on establishing rapport with the community, first by using a modified *PACE EH* process to assist in the revitalizing of the area community association. Over a period of six weeks, community volunteers used the action planning process embedded in *PACE EH* to staff the floundering association, produce new by-laws and hold chapter elections.

The *PACE EH* model was then successfully adapted to respond to severe storm damage and community disruption following hurricane season. *PACE EH* provided the blueprint for both short and long term emergency planning in Wahneta, mobilizing community resources to deliver food and water to the most in need community members.

As the community settles into more traditional usage of *PACE EH*, a primary focus is the need for improved lighting and safer community planning initiatives. Participants are working on identifying the necessary partners to help improve local outdoor lighting. The team is meeting with TECO, the electric provider for the community. They hope to divide the Wahneta area into manageable areas and begin soliciting support for improved lighting of the community.

Traffic safety and environmental quality is a related concern identified by the Wahneta community. The assessment team members, applying the *PACE EH* methodology, were able to identify specific needs, define goals for improvement, develop an action plan, and are presently executing the plan. They have gained the support of several organizations within the community who will help them clean and maintain identified roadways, sidewalks, and ditches to improve the safety of community members, especially school-age children.

Future activities include the development and distribution of an environmental health survey. The survey will establish the primary environmental health concerns of the community, community assets to address those concerns, distinguish between the environmental health concerns of the local Caucasian community and those of the local Hispanic community. It will be direct mailed to residents, distributed at local stores and bodegas, and offered in both Spanish and English versions, to encourage a high response rate.

### **Putnam County**

Environmental health issues have taken center stage in the Putnam County Health Department Quality Improvement strategic planning process after major hurricanes that hit Florida in August and September 2004. Torrential rains caused major flooding in Putnam County that has led to contamination of wells, sewage runoff, and an explosion in mosquito populations.

Putnam County officials are very concerned about the disease risks to the residents in this area as well as other residents who live along the St. Johns River in East Putnam County. Many are poor and/or elderly. Many of Putnam's poorer residents are at high risk of mosquito-borne illnesses because they live in housing without air conditioning and have no screens on their windows and doors.

Because most Putnam County residents use well water long-term significant environmental health concerns have worsened since the storms. Anecdotal data from PCHD's Environmental Health Program specialists, Health Department medical professionals, and the local medical community suggest that there has been an increase in bacterial, protozoan, and insect related illness and that these problems may worsen before they improve.

The *PACE EH* environmental health assessment team includes representation from the Putnam County Chronic Disease Workgroup, Putnam County Commissioners, County Code Enforcement officials, City government officials, St. Johns River Management District, city public works officials, mosquito control representatives, representatives from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Department of Fish and Game, local medical professionals, representatives from the faith community, minority representation, and private citizens.

The assessment team is developing the goals and objectives for their *PACE EH* work (Task 4). Fortunately, this work is being led by the Social Work Services Program Manager who has completed the Florida Department of Health sponsored Facilitative Leadership Training.

### **Sarasota County**

The Sarasota County Health Department is using *PACE EH* funding to identify and address issues of environmental equity by gathering historical data in low-income areas of the county. Sources of environmental health risks such as illegal landfills, pesticide exposure, water quality and hazardous waste are being evaluated as part of this process.

The North Sarasota County Community Action Coalition is facilitating the local *PACE EH* process. Attendance and commitment is strong, averaging 30 or more participants per meeting. The majority of participants are African American, reflecting the demographics of North Sarasota. To date, established local environmental health issues include; regulation and enforcement, flooding and drainage, traffic safety, sewage treatment, and landlord-tenant disputes.

Sites of potential environmental contamination that have been identified at team meetings are being sampled and analyzed. The community is very concerned that many citizens dispose of waste inappropriately, especially tires. The county has posted no dumping signs at the locations identified as areas of concern for dumping, but this appears to be an ongoing battle. Law enforcement is willing to work with the community to pursue any leads, but the community must be willing to provide them.

*PACE EH* efforts have resulted in a Community Clean-Up day during which a significant amount of “junk” was collected and properly disposed. The team is working with Sarasota County Public Works to schedule another clean up day during the coming quarter. A presentation was made before the Board of County Commissioners earlier this year to discuss the findings and needs of the community.

### **Seminole County**

The *PACE EH* grant is funding the development of a community survey to assess issues related to water quality safety, hazardous waste sites, indoor air quality and childhood lead poisoning. These issues are increasingly prominent in Seminole County due to rapid development, pollution hazards and drought conditions that have occurred over the past several years.

### **Taylor County**

Still very much in the formative period, initial plans call for *PACE EH* funding to Taylor County to be used to assess and address community drinking water system issues in the community of Steinhatchee.

### **Walton County**

The Walton County *PACE EH* assessment team is completing the initial stages of its project, and are in the process of developing a survey to gauge local perceptions of environmental health. Its *PACE EH* work is contributing to a countywide "Walton County 2020" visioning process. This process will support efforts to integrate environmental health issues into county's overall priorities and implement a public awareness campaign.

The team is focusing its outreach efforts on the city of Freeport and its immediate environs in response to rapid development and a demonstrated need among the residents for environmental health education.

The *PACE EH* survey the team is developing will solicit community perceptions around five specific environmental health topic areas, water quality, mosquito vectors, waste management, land use, and access to health care.





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