

Climate Change Demonstration Site: Orange County (FL) Health Department



NAME OF DEMONSTRATION SITE:

Orange County (FL) Health Department

NAME OF DEMONSTRATION SITE PROJECT:

Orange County Public Health Effects of Climate Change Project

Project Summary

The goal of the Orange County Public Health Effects of Climate Change project was to help create a community that is more educated and aware of the impacts of climate change on public health and that takes both personal and collective action to mitigate the potentially devastating effects of climate change. To accomplish this, the program had several phases including planning, implementation, and evaluation of its effectiveness. The program aimed to do the following:

- Conduct training for at least 75 percent of Orange County Health Department (OCHD) employees;
- Participate in partner outreach;
- Conduct a vulnerability assessment (in the form of geographic information system (GIS) overlays);
- Create a strategic plan; and
- Create an educational video production about the health effects of climate change in central Florida that could be disseminated widely to the public.

Evaluation of the program revealed that the training, partner outreach, and the vulnerability assessment were successful. Program staff received positive responses to the training initiatives and were able to educate new partners about the public health effects of climate change. OCHD completed a video, "Health Effects of Global Climate Change in Central Florida," which was a great outlet to disseminate information about the relationship between health and climate change. OCHD sent the video to more than 100 local health departments (LHDs) and partners across the country; the video is also available on OCHD's YouTube page and in NACCHO's Climate Change Toolkit at <http://bit.ly/LbvG0j>.

Project Outcomes

OCHD met its target of training over 75 percent of staff on the health effects of climate change. Out of the 689 full- and part-time employees of OCHD, 571 responded to a pre-training test (an 82% response rate). The pre-training test was given to obtain a knowledge baseline for the staff, and a post-training test was given to record the effectiveness of the training. A seven-percent improvement of staff competency regarding knowledge of possible health effects associated with climate change was noted after reviewing the pre-training and post-training tests. Knowledge gaps were also identified through this process, including the need for training on emerging infectious diseases and the threat that they pose. Training slides and pre- and post-assessment tests are available in NACCHO's Climate Change Toolkit.



Project Outcomes, cont.

To inform the public about the health effects of climate change, OCHD sent a press release to local TV stations, newspapers, and radio stations. OCHD did a 20-minute radio spot about the Orange County Public Health Effects of Climate Change Project, including the background on the grant, global warming and public health education, and information on what the LHD planned to accomplish with the grant. The project also partnered with the University of Central Florida and the Florida Department of Health to disseminate information on the project at two community forums. To maximize exposure, OCHD also created a professional educational video and, through a partnership with the Orange County Environmental Protection Division, secured verbal commitment to showcase the educational video at the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC).

In fiscal year 2005, the OCCC hosted 259 events and more than 1.4 million attendees. The LHD solicited new coalition members including Orange TV and the consultant GES, which constructed an educational kiosk at the Orange County Convention Center to showcase the video on an interactive display. OCHD also received verbal commitment to put the educational video on Orange TV, the county's TV station, which would give the video exposure to most of the residents of Orange County. Additionally, the video production was ultimately sent to more than 100 LHDs and partners and added to OCHD's YouTube page, making it available nationally.

Finally, OCHD used geographic information systems (GIS) for a needs assessment to determine areas of the county and segments of the population most at risk for health issues associated with climate changes.

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Stories from the Field

- The video producer working on the educational video, by his own admission, was not knowledgeable about the topic and thought climate change involved melting ice caps and polar bears—not impacts that he perceived would affect him directly in Central Florida. Through discussion about the content on the video and the outline provided, he gained better insight about the topic and helped shape the format and concept of what was envisioned for the production.
- The Florida Department of Health workshop's featured attendees from several counties and jurisdictional areas. During a breakout session on obstacles to addressing public health and climate change, one attendee remarked that his department, emergency management, had an especially small staff and no one in particular was assigned lead responsibility for connecting these two issues. With reductions in budget and staff, this theme is commonplace across many departments. Project staff were encouraged that he took personal responsibility not only to attend and voice his concerns to the workshop host but also to share some important perspectives from emergency management.
- A staff member received a phone call from one of the local hospitals. Having received an e-mail with the training presentation, pre-training and post-training tests, and cover letter, the caller asked, "What am I supposed to do with this?" The reply included an explanation of the grant project, its objectives, and the desire to reach out to additional partners to join in the effort. The caller thanked staff for the explanation and assured the staff member that the material would be read and followed up on. Project staff appreciated the chance to interact with a potential partner, explain the work, share knowledge, and make connections.



Lessons Learned

- Get support from upper management to implement the project. Even with the support of the OCHD's director, project staff found it somewhat difficult to get all employees to take the training online.
- If training is being provided to the entire LHD staff, use all-staff meetings to provide a better opportunity for a captive audience.
- Focus on how climate change education specifically affects public health. During each educational meeting that OCHD conducted, the audience was well aware of climate change and how it affects the environment but not how it will affect public health. Further, emphasizing the effects of climate change on public health puts a personal spin on how climate change could affect the audience members.
- During trainings, avoid the issue of climate change causation and instead concentrate on the prevention and planning for the effects on public health due to climate change.
- Consider how to establish additional partnerships. Even though OCHD partnered with educational centers, environmental planning entities (such as MetroPlan Orlando), and other governmental agencies, OCHD was not able to take advantage of additional opportunities to partner with emergency services such as the Red Cross and non-denominational organizations.
- Consider potential challenges. For example, one challenge OCHD encountered during the project was establishing a relationship with the County Environmental Protection Division to update the county's strategic plan to include health-related elements.
- Build coalitions early to understand from the onset what experience and abilities partners can contribute.

Project Sustainability and Capacity Building

The training of OCHD staff increased staff knowledge and fostered discussion on public health and climate change. The response of OCHD staff to the training and testing surpassed the initial expectations of project staff.

OCHD intends to continue project activities because climate change is a priority for the LHD. Climate change, one of the program areas of OCHD's Environmental Health Division, has been written into the public health planner role. OCHD is also actively seeking other climate change-related grants in order to continue to build capacity and create project sustainability.

The OCHD project will continue to have an impact moving forward. The educational video production is available to LHDs nationwide. A permanent kiosk will be on display at the Orange County Convention Center (the second largest convention center in the United States) to present the video and other information. Finally, OCHD will plan to participate in any additional trainings from other organizations or agencies that are made available to LHD staff.

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[FACT SHEET]

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Jacques Colon
Program Analyst
202-507-4207
jcolon@naccho.org



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1100 17th St, NW, 7th Floor Washington, DC 20036

P 202-783-5550 F 202-783-1583

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