



## Approach to Outreach on Environmental Health Issues

Residents, community leaders, and environmental groups have asked about the New York State Department of Health outreach process for environmental health investigations and reports. The Department interacts with the public via telephone calls, e-mail messages, its Internet website, press releases, fact sheets, reports, public meetings and availability sessions.

The Center for Environmental Health has primary responsibility for overseeing activities that focus on health and the environment. The Cancer Surveillance Program, within the Center for Community Health, conducts investigations of cancer incidence for both areas with a specific environmental concern and areas where no such concern has been identified.

1

The public, when feasible, will be provided the opportunity to provide suggestions and comments in the early design of health studies. When active community groups are identified, their input will be solicited **before** the design of a health study is finalized. Local government, local health departments, universities, hospitals, community groups or others may be contacted to determine what roles they may wish to play in assisting with health studies. In all cases, the confidentiality of personal medical information will be protected.

2

Representatives of a community may be contacted to seek their perspective to further understand their concerns, or to provide an informational tour of the neighborhood to be studied.

3



When public interest or concern is evident or at the request of local elected officials or community groups, a public meeting (a formal presentation followed by a question-and-answer period), availability session (an informal, small group and/or one-on-one discussions), or both will be held to exchange information and seek community input. The public will be given a minimum of two weeks' notice, whenever

possible, if a public meeting and/or availability session is to be held. The meeting date, time, location, and agenda will be coordinated with representatives of the local community, when possible, to encourage maximum attendance.

4

If a public meeting or availability session is being held to discuss the outcome of a study, the public will be given an informational fact sheet and/or a complete draft report, when possible, at least two weeks in advance. A translated version will be provided when a significant population of non-English speaking residents is identified. Efforts will be made to develop a comprehensive mailing list and to widely advertise a public meeting or availability session in advance of its occurrence.



- 5 In most cases, draft reports will be released before the public meeting or availability session to foster meaningful dialogue during the meeting. However, in some cases draft reports will be released for the first time at the public meeting or availability session to avoid potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations. In those cases the public will have the opportunity to review the report and, if requested, another meeting or availability session will be held to obtain comments about the report and to help address any questions or concerns.
- 6 The public will be provided the opportunity to comment on draft reports for 30 days after they are released. Efforts will be made to make documents clear and understandable for all audiences regardless of scientific or technical expertise; if that is not easily accomplished, a report will be accompanied by a fact sheet that uses less technical terms or language. Comments received will be taken into consideration before finalizing reports.
- 7 A local document repository, such as a public library or community center, will be found in the community to make the report publicly available to those who may not have received the report otherwise.
- 8 Information about what studies are in progress and an estimated timeframe for completion (e.g., quarter and year) will be available. Examples are the work plan for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry health consultations/public health assessments; schedules or work plans will be developed and distributed for other study areas.

## For more information

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Please note: This outline is a 'living' document that may be revised over time.