



## 2005 Jim Parker Award

The Award was established in 1993 to honor the memory of Jim Parker, who served as Director of the Community Health Services Division of the Minnesota Department of Health. Jim Parker was a strong advocate for local and state health department collaboration and his influence extended throughout the public health community due to his work on national health efforts and in particular, APEXPH.

**The award is only available to state and local health departments.** Joint state/local application are encouraged but not required. One winner will be selected and recognized at the NACCHO Annual Awards Luncheon at the 2005 NACCHO-ASTHO Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts in July. Please note that there are no travel funds or other monetary awards available for the winner. This award is offered jointly by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), and the Association of State and Territorial Local Health Liaison Officials (ASTLHLO).

**Abstract:** Florida is experiencing continued, unprecedented growth and the need to assess environmental quality and human health in a holistic manner has continued to intensify. Environmental Health professionals can take a leadership role by supporting community assessment processes such as the Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH). The Florida Department of Health is the only state agency in the nation that has supported the PACE EH process in 21 counties, including the Indian River County Health Department.

Results from the Wabasso Community PACE EH in Indian River County show a strong need to closely examine the way we develop and service our communities. The process has addressed community needs not captured through programmatic and funding structures of state and local EH agencies. Support needs to be in place for environmental health professionals to complement their programmatic schedules with community assessments, and to have a role in local land use planning decisions.

**Problem Statement:** The Florida Department of Health’s Division of Environmental Health has a robust business plan and program evaluation process in partnership with its 67 county health departments, which are hybrid state/local partnership agencies. The evaluation process reviews statutorily-mandated county health department (CHD) core programs, which form the backbone of the department’s environmental health efforts. Through a process of continuous improvement and evaluation, we asked ourselves several questions: If we got all of our environmental health programs “right” or “complete”, could we declare the state environmentally healthy? Could we declare it at the county level? Are we too focused programmatically in Florida? This led to the hypothesis that perhaps the EH programmatic and funding structure of both state and local agencies may miss the "bigger picture" of the environmental health of the community.

This is an especially important issue in Florida which is experiencing continued, unprecedented growth, adding the pressure of 750 people every day to its schools, highways, water supplies, and open space. As communities become increasingly aware of the myriad links between environmental quality and human health, the need to address environmental health issues as perceived by the community will intensify. Further, pockets of existing communities will continue to risk being forgotten or receive a disparate level of services as new communities are developed.

Environmental Health Professionals can attempt to address some of these issues, yet environmental health has been a historically under-funded area with services that are “out of sight”. The Division of Environmental Health proposed partnering with CHDs to implement a



well-developed and executed community environmental health assessment process to complement a regimen of core programs. This will provide communities a process for relating and understanding environmental health concerns, a method to fill the “gaps” between programs, and a means for EH professionals to engage community partners in a leadership role.

**Objectives:** The Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE-EH) was deemed the best tool to use to accomplish these areas of interest. This community-based process is a product of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and aligned with Healthy People 2010 initiatives. The Florida Department of Health has a long history with this process, dating back to membership on the project’s steering committee in the mid-1990s. The methodology is specific to environmental health:

<http://www.naccho.org/topics/environmental/CEHA.cfm>

Further, state office staff felt the following objectives could be addressed using the methodology and tasks listed in the PACE EH tool:

- ◆ Understand the relationship between the built environmental and environmental health,
- ◆ View environmental health more holistically than programmatically,
- ◆ Build trust between the CHD and the community, which will improve the effectiveness of existing programs and other public health efforts,
- ◆ Rely less on media outlets to establish the relationship between government and the public,
- ◆ Address outstanding environmental health issues not captured at the program level,
- ◆ Further integrate environmental health (prevention programs) with the clinical programs of the CHD,
- ◆ Allow communities to express and define their environmental health issues themselves,
- ◆ Establish relationships with local land use planners and public officials, and
- ◆ Empower a community to action beyond the life of the project.

In order to implement the PACE EH process in Florida, the Division of Environmental Health offered a number of small grants to institute pilot PACE EH projects. Indian River County Health Department (IRCHD) was one of the county EH programs to apply and was subsequently funded at \$30,000 in a one time transfer to start a pilot PACE EH process. IRCHD hired a coordinator, Julianne Renk, to facilitate the process. The county's objective was to conduct an environmental health assessment and public education campaign to generate needed community-identified improvements, such as potable water supplies, functioning sewage treatment systems and sanitary facilities in Wabasso – a disadvantaged, predominately minority community in the county. The state office supported the efforts with an initial orientation meeting between the CHDs and NACCHO officials, then through a website and monthly conference calls where project participants could share ideas and findings.

**Methodology:** All quantitative and qualitative evidence regarding community issues, suggested solutions, and current status were presented to the community. Over a series of meetings, issues were discussed in great detail and identified as priorities for which immediate action was required. Many of the issues identified do not fall within the traditional definition of “environmental health”, but nonetheless they all affect the health of the community. The top five environmental health issues identified by the community were: lack of housing, safety (drug trafficking), street lighting, access to potable water, and septic failures/lack of access to sewer. IRCHD EH staff and the Wabasso community worked together to address the identified issues. Several partnerships were created with the Director of Community Development, the County Administrator, Director of Public Works, County Commissioners, and the Sheriff of Indian River County to address identified issues. Progress was measured by comparing stated goals with actual/tangible project outcomes.

**Resources:** Financial resources were a one time internal offering from Florida Department of Health environmental health trust fund dollars. The expenditure of these funds is limited by



statute. Historically, they were usually returned to CHDs in the form of requested equipment. Over a period of years, the state Division of Environmental Health advocated to county health departments to undertake the PACE EH process in their communities. The most common reasons given for not being able to do this were a lack of funds and/or personnel. A short application process was created and CHD EH programs were invited to submit proposals as part of a voluntary process designed to fund innovative projects which incorporate PACE-EH principles of community collaboration and strategic assessment and planning. State resources were maximized by using trust fund dollars to identify community EH issues, supplementing existing environmental health programs. Local EH personnel complemented the financial resource by being involved in the PACE EH process, in some cases including the EH Director and the CHD administrator. The Indian River PACE EH project is notable for its successful involvement of EH and CHD leadership.

**Results:** The return on the \$30,000 investment is estimated to be over \$1million in public and private resources. Visible, physical improvements to the community are indicators of success to the residents of West Wabasso. The level of trust gained with the community is extraordinary.

Tangible results from the PACE EH project include:

- ◆ Installation of streetlights has been completed.
- ◆ Ninety-five percent of required easements for a potable water project have been secured.
- ◆ A sidewalk project has been developed.
- ◆ Two park pavilion projects have been developed. The county has awarded the bid and construction is underway.
- ◆ Project Hope, dedicated to rebuilding homes in Wabasso, has been instituted. Currently, six homes have been demolished and Project Hope has committed to rebuilding at least three of them.

- ◆ Trust between the community and the county health department has been restored – rather than viewing the county health department as ignoring the community (the first community meeting consisted of residents shouting complaints at officials), they now look to Ms. Renk for help resolving their issues.

Project results from across the funded counties show a strong need to closely examine the way we build, develop, and service our communities and the associated impacts on our public health. The PACE EH process has been successful in elevating several of these communities to local leaders and demonstrating how a consistent process and expectation needs to be in place for public health and environmental health to have a role in local land use planning decisions. While pilot program funding has ended, several CHDs have seen the value of the process and decided to continue funding the effort. Community assessment processes, like PACE EH, are now required in CHD administrator’s job descriptions. Wabasso is back on the map in Indian River County. At the state level, the Florida Department of Health has drafted a Memorandum of Agreement with two other state agencies on growth management issues.

Complete project summaries from Indian River and other counties are publicly available at the Florida Department of Health PACE EH Website:

<http://www.myfloridaeh.com/programs/PACE-EH/PACE-EH.htm>