

CHESHIRE PUBLIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT: WHAT TO EXPECT?

BACKGROUND

Some Cheshire citizens have expressed concerns about reported contamination in their community and whether such contamination may be related to health effects such as cancer. The Connecticut Department of Public Health (CT DPH), with assistance from the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is planning to conduct a Public Health Assessment for Cheshire. ATSDR is a federal public health agency and has a cooperative agreement with CT DPH. This agreement allows us to conduct public health assessment activities in Connecticut.



WHAT IS A PUBLIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT?

A Public Health Assessment is a process that reviews available information about hazardous substances and evaluates whether exposure to them can cause any harm to people. A Public Health Assessment is not the same thing as a medical examination or community health survey. However, a Public Health Assessment may sometimes lead to other public health activities.

In conducting a Public Health Assessment (PHA), three main sources of information are reviewed:

- **Environmental data**, such as sampling data on levels of chemicals in soil, water or air, and how people could have come in contact with such contaminants,
- **Health data**, including available information about rates of diseases in the community compared to state rates,
- **Community concerns** obtained by different means: community concerns questionnaires, public availability sessions (office hours when people can drop in and ask questions), and meetings.

The PHA ties the different sources of information into a complete picture of the site. For instance, health outcome data are evaluated with consideration of biological plausibility—is there a proven or suspected relationship between a chemical and certain types of health effects? The final document outlines the likelihood of risks from the site and makes recommendations for follow-up if warranted. The PHA will not provide conclusions about cause and effect between exposure and disease, and cannot comment on possible causes of specific cases of disease. If warranted, follow-up recommendations could include health studies or more environmental monitoring. The final PHA document will be received and signed off by ATSDR in Atlanta, Georgia.

WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH DATA WILL BE EXAMINED?

CT DPH will use information and data from: 1) the public water supply; 2) private wells, and 3) soil at specific waste sites. These specific sites include ones that citizens have expressed concerns about, and those that are listed as possible waste sites by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

CT DPH will use data from the Connecticut Tumor Registry for the town of Cheshire to assess rates of cancer in Cheshire compared to rates for the entire state of Connecticut.

HOW WILL THE COMMUNITY BE INVOLVED IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

During the process, there will be:

- Continuing contact with the community group, town government, and local health authorities.
- A community needs assessment survey to gather input on suspected health risks in the area.
- Approximately 3 Public Availability Sessions will be held at different times of the day to hear comments from residents.
- A Community Advisory Panel which will keep CT DPH informed about community concerns, and in turn, keep Cheshire residents informed about the status of the Public Health Assessment.
- A draft Public Health Assessment distributed to the public for comment.
- Ongoing collection of concerns: e-mail comments to kenny.foscue@po.state.ct.us

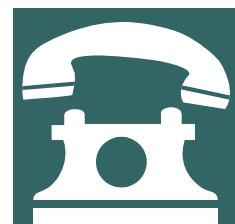
HOW WILL THE PUBLIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT BE USED?

The results of the Public Health Assessment will be used to determine if environmental hazards exist, what potential health risks are posed by these hazards, and what can be done to reduce the exposure hazard or health risk. The findings will be used to evaluate whether health studies or other public actions should be recommended.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Special information on PHAs:

www.atsdr.cdc.gov/training/public-health-assessment-overview/

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