



## **What environmental health work does the Department of Health do?**

We examine how different environmental factors affect a person's well-being. Complaints or questions can be directed to us if an individual is concerned that their health has been, or will be, impacted by environmental conditions. We can assess environmental sampling data and/or clinical (e.g., toxicological) data to inform public health recommendations to keep the public safe. This work is done within the Bureau of Epidemiology at the Department of Health.

## **What do we do during and after environmental emergencies that impacted people's health, such as a chemical spill, train derailment, or factory explosion?**

There are a variety of actions we can take depending on the severity and type of environmental emergency, such as:

- Provide information to community members, health care providers and other agencies regarding chemical exposures and determine if there is a risk for adverse health effects based upon the concentration, frequency, duration, and type of chemical exposure.
- Provide guidance to healthcare providers on clinical testing appropriate for the type of chemical exposure and assistance in interpreting the test results.
- Review data on chemical test results from air, water, and soil samples to determine if there is a risk for adverse health effects. This data is usually acquired from the collection and testing done by PA Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP), other environmental health agencies or other certified laboratories. This technical support may be at the request of an affected resident or other agencies such as PA DEP, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), etc.
- Provide guidance on actions that residents might take to reduce harmful exposures in air, water, and soil.
- Design and distribute health surveys among residents and impacted first responders to better understand chemical exposure characteristics, health symptoms experienced, and community needs and concerns.
- Establish temporary health resource centers to assist community members in survey completion, provide resources, and staff nurses to take basic vitals and recommend follow-up with a primary care provider.
- Collaborate with local (e.g., municipalities), state (e.g., PA DEP), and federal (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) entities to help ensure that community needs are heard and met, especially as it relates to health concerns.



## What guidance and services are we unable to provide?

- We are unable to provide medical guidance or treatment to individuals impacted by an environmental health emergency. We defer to health care providers for all questions related to medical guidance and/or treatment plans.
- We are unable to conduct short-term or long-term biomonitoring studies, such as the collection and analysis of blood or urine, along with other health metrics, of impacted communities. Such studies are typically led by an academic or medical institution. However, we can provide technical support and subject matter expertise to these entities for their health study.

## Where can I find additional resources regarding environmental exposures and health?

For more information on services and resources, visit us [on our webpage](#).

## How can I contact the Department of Health with questions or concerns about environment and health?

We can be reached by:

**Email:** [env.health.concern@pa.gov](mailto:env.health.concern@pa.gov) or [dehe@pa.gov](mailto:dehe@pa.gov)

**Phone:** 717-787-3350

**Environmental Health Concern Form:** [Submit a Form](#)