

Collaborative on Health and the Environment – Northwest (CHE-NW)

March 30, 2004

Noon – 2:00 pm, Antioch University, Seattle, WA

In attendance:

Chetana Acharya – Community Outreach and Education Program, University of Washington

Morgan Bary—Public Health, Seattle and King County, Environmental Health Division

Marnie Boardman—Washington Department of Health, Health-Tracking

Ann Clifton – Mercury Awareness Team

B.J. Cummings – Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition

Charlie Cunniff—Environmental Coalition of South Seattle (ECOSS)

Kate Davies—Antioch University

Christy Diemund – Uninformed Consent / Mercury Awareness Team

Ticiang Diangson – Seattle Public Utilities

Nancy Dickeman – Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility

Christy Diamond – Uninformed Consent / Mercury Awareness Team

Sibyl Diver – Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition

Pam Emerson – Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10

Robin-Evans Agnew—American Lung Association of Washington

Steven Gilbert – Institute of Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders

Lise Glaser – Cascadia Consulting Group

Andrea Jensen – Uninformed Consent / Mercury Awareness Team

Suellen Mele – Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation

Elise Miller – Institute for Children’s Environmental Health

John Moore – Uninformed Consent / Mercury Awareness Team of Washington

Don Norman -

Bill Panos – Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

Linda Park – Seattle Biotech Legacy Foundation (SBLF)

Maria Victoria Peeler— Department of Ecology

Janna Rolland – Cascade Center, School of Public Affairs, **University of Washington**

Marianne Seifert—State Board of Health

Rachel Severson – University of Washington, Department of Psychology

Yolanda Sinde – Community Coalition for Environmental Justice

Karen Snyder – Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety & Health Center (PNASH)

Laurie Valeriano – Washington Toxics Coalition

Moya Vazquez – Seattle Biotech Legacy Foundation (SBLF)

Julie West – Public Health, Seattle and King County (PHSKC), Environmental Health Division

Cheri Zehner – environmental health consultant

1. CHE-NW has its first anniversary!

Elise Miller opened the meeting by providing background on the establishment of the national Collaborative on Health and the Environment (CHE) in March 2002 and CHE-Northwest (CHE-NW) in March of 2003. As CHE-NW completes its first year, we have a superb opportunity to reflect on accomplishments, and strategize on directions and core competencies of the Collaborative.

2. Updates

A. Precautionary Principle

Steve Gilbert, with assistance from Sibyl Diver, Elise Miller, Robin Evans-Agnew and others on the CHE-NW Working Group on the Precautionary Principle, has led the charge to include a statement on the precautionary principle (PP) as an amendment to King County's and the City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan. A public hearing was held on the PP at City Hall on March 16th and several people from the Working Group presented testimony. A letter from the City Planning Commission's attorney has asked that we respond to a host of questions about the practical implications of implementation of the Precautionary Principle. Steve and others will draft a response to those.

We are still seeking endorsements from organizations from various sectors on the PP white paper that was drafted by the CHE-NW working group. The paper has already gotten some national attention as well.

The League of Women Voters publication, *Seattle Voter*, included an article on the precautionary approach to environmental principles – with assistance from Kate Davies and John Roberts.

B. Precautionary Principle Events on April 22.

CHE-NW and Seattle City Councilmember Nick Licata will host a “brown bag lunch” at City Hall from Noon -1:30 p.m. on April 22nd to discuss the precautionary principle with national experts Ted Schettler, MD, MPH, Carolyn Raffensperger, JD and Peter Montague. From 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. that same afternoon, University of Washington's Program on the Environment and the Department of Occupational Health Studies, in collaboration with CHE-NW, will present these guests/speakers on the UW campus. Both events are open to the general public; there is even the possibility of a mock debate with Steve “acting” as the opposition.

Steve is serving as the point person on these events and needs additional help. Flyers are forthcoming and those involved in CHE-NW are encouraged to spread the word about these events to your listservs and through newsletters.

3. Ideas for Collaborative Projects for CHE-NW members

Elise noted that the CHE-NW Precautionary Principle Working Group is a great example of an initiative that invites different sectors to work together on something that has broad implications for environmental health—and that is “value added” to everything else the individual organizations are already doing in the region. She then requested that others suggest ideas for initiatives that are not “pet projects” of individual groups, but instead, would be opportunities for CHE-NW members to work collectively on issues that, like the PP, can help augment all of our efforts. Ticiang Diangson clarified this by drawing a large circle for CHE-NW and then smaller circles overlapping with CHE-NW, representing different “nodes” or working groups that might emerge or be seeded by the CHE-NW meetings.

A. Research and data collection on the links between environmental exposures and adverse health outcomes.

Kate Davies proposed a project to make explicit links between environmental and health data (i.e., toxics in the air and asthma) in the Puget Sound region and possible across Washington State. This will be a reference tool for government agencies to inform policy makers, as well as

an educational and organizing tool for groups working on these issues. Kate envisions producing a research synthesis, assembled as a report or database, that would serve as a “one window” approach to environmental health data in this region. An economic piece on environmentally attributable costs of health care and lost income due to these chronic diseases and disabilities would be a second step. This would be similar to a project that Phil Landrigan and his colleagues did nationally as well as one that focused just on Massachusetts. There was significant enthusiasm for this project, particularly around economic costs. Kate is looking for CHE-NW members to serve in an advisory capacity to this work over the summer months.

B. Engaging health-affected groups.

Sibyl Diver suggested further cultivating relationships with health-affected groups, to build the strength of CHE-NW, increase our ability to successfully deliver our message, and boost our impact. She recommended a three-pronged approach:

- Working with groups to educate ourselves about the health-affected groups’ concerns and current strategies in order to build partnerships;
- Working with these groups to develop our advocacy efforts and linking to the media; and
- Strengthening our data and research by gaining access to more state specific information on how many people (or %) are health-affected by environmental health issues in Washington state.

The group suggested methods for building relationships, including:

- Examining the current participants’ list in CHE-NW and identifying gaps and outreach priorities;
- Having health affected groups present at CHE-NW meetings; and
- Presenting at meetings of health-affected groups.

C. Other ideas:

- *Environmental justice:* Ticiang Diangson suggested making a deliberate effort to link more strongly to the environmental justice movement. There could be a “SWAT team” to help build relationships using trainings on how to communicate cross-culturally and other ways to learn from each other. In this context, Chetana Acharya reminded that environmental health is environmental justice and that environmental justice needs to be deeply embedded in all of our work;
- *Growth management:* Focusing on growth management issues and using this area as a way to apply the precautionary principle. Rachel Severson noted that the University of Washington is doing urban simulation work that examines metrics of health (such as the walk-ability of communities to help reduce obesity and depression)—the simulation work has a very high reliability for predicting longitudinally;
- *Science education:* Offering science-oriented education and training to raise the level of knowledge of the staff of smaller nonprofits and other organizations. Additionally, it was noted that we should facilitate ways that people with scientific expertise can be useful in advocacy settings. Steve Gilbert remarked that the Society of Toxicology is trying to do just this – getting members more engaged as “citizen toxicologists.” Elise noted that a number of individual members of the national CHE are doing this and we might consider starting each of our CHE-NW sessions with science updates from experts. This would also be a way to attract more scientists and researchers.

- *“Health-centered” outreach and presentations:* Framing health issues in terms of environmental contributors as a way to approach health care providers (school nurses, midwives, public health types). We should make an effort to get on their agendas and speak at their conferences; and
- *State regulations:* Taking advantage of the timing of rules revisions, such as for child care facilities and health and safety in schools. This is a great opportunity to influence state regulations. One specific example of this was from Carol Dansereau, who couldn’t be at the meeting, but sent an e-mail which said: “The state agriculture department (WSDA) has agreed to consider proposing buffer zones around schools, nursing homes, and other institutions. (Farm worker advocates and others are also calling for buffer zones around workers and their homes, and for other drift-prevention measures.) In terms of the potential rule itself, buffer zones would reduce contamination of school children and others (a major problem) and would create pressure for alternatives by reducing acreage on which pesticides can be used. In terms of organizing, we are building a network of great allies who will speak for public health in this forum. Groups and individuals representing nursing home residents, school teachers, nurses, parents of children made ill by pesticides at school, and others are all getting involved. Farm Worker Pesticide Project and others will be working within the rules process (starts with a workgroup), but also coordinating broader public pressure via work with the news media, other outreach and education, arranging for statements from medical professionals (for example about pesticides banned residentially which are used agriculturally right next to children), and other activities.
- *Working with other colleagues in neighboring states (and other areas of Washington State):* Elise mentioned that colleagues who attended the very first CHE-NW meeting in Seattle last year have not been able to participate in the ongoing face-to-face meetings simply because of the distance. Though we call ourselves “CHE-NW,” we are essentially, CHE-Puget Sound in terms of those who can actually come to meetings. That said, Elise noted that we have been doing some collaboration with our Oregon colleagues through the environmental health lecture series (we coordinated speakers, etc.) and we are doing the same for the April 22nd events on the precautionary principle, since the same speakers will have just been in Oregon for a similar activity. Suggestions for how to help coordinate more efforts with those not in the Seattle area included: hosting quarterly phone calls; having an annual meeting perhaps some place other than Seattle; and using conference call technology to link in people not in Seattle for our ongoing face-to-face meetings.

C. Building our own capacity

It was noted that we have many different interests and topics of concern in the collaborative, but the important thing is to work together, while preserving our individual interests and strengths. To take advantage of the wealth of knowledge in the room, to build our understanding of this broad field, and to be as inclusive as possible, several ideas were suggested:

- Have everyone check in briefly highlight the latest on their initiatives. Though this takes awhile, people felt it was one of the most meaningful aspects of some of our first meetings in terms of building connections and sharing information.

- Have each meeting include two or three 7-10-minute presentations to highlight a specific initiative that has very current relevance and/or to share expertise with the group on a particular topic;
- Create a CHE-NW website with all of the participating organizations' links and information on current and emerging initiatives as well as pertinent articles;
- Take advantage of national CHE's monthly conference calls. On these calls, cutting-edge scientists and thinkers provide tutorials. Check www.cheforhealth.org for more information; and
- Host quarterly conference calls to connect with other CHE colleagues and organizations in the Northwest.
- Have meetings last for three hours, rather than only two, so that we can dig into issues. (This idea met with some resistance given that many people can't stay that long given other commitments.)

4. Moving Forward

A. Programmatic opportunities

The following ideas seemed to garner the most interest from the group:

- Continue our work on the **precautionary principle**, including examining growth management, an executive order from the outgoing Governor, developing a relationship with Christine Gregoire, and more work at the King County/City of Seattle level. (Steve Gilbert)
- Move forward on **health and environmental research and data compilation on economic costs** (Kate Davies).
- Build relationships with **health affected groups** (Sibyl Diver, Laurie Valeriano, Nancy Dickeman) and health care providers (Pam Emerson?).
- **Develop a web site** (Elise Miller)
- **Develop a cross-cultural training /"SWAT team"** (Ticiang Diangson, Chetana Archarya).
- **Develop strategies to address rules revisions** in state regulations (Carol Dansereau).

B. Basic structures for meetings

- Divide our meetings between scientific updates, brief presentations from each participant on their group's initiatives, longer presentations on specific topics, updates from the working groups, and strategic discussions about moving looking forward.

- Quarterly conference calls for the larger region.
- Annual meeting—possibly in a place other than Seattle.
- Connecting out-of-towners by speaker phone at our meetings.
- Meet again in mid-June.

5. Other announcements:

- Community Coalition for Environmental Justice will be holding its annual meeting April 24 –25 in Seattle. For more information, see www.ccej.org or call: **206-720-0285**.
- Kate Davies will be teaching a course in the fall at Antioch on environmental health.
- John Moore requested that anyone interested in learning more about mercury in dental amalgams or other sources of mercury exposure to contact him at: 425-226-4464.