

October 25, 2007

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-131 Capitol
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David R. Obey
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room H-218 Capitol
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-146A Capitol
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Room 1016 LHOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Byrd, Chairman Obey, Ranking Member Cochran and Ranking Member Lewis:

The undersigned organizations join in urging your support for including the House-passed funding levels for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and Environmental Health Laboratory. Under the National Center for Environmental Health, the measure would provide \$40.4 million for its Environmental Health Laboratory and \$26.5 million for the National Environmental Public Health Outcome Tracking Program.

The World Health Organization estimates that a quarter of all preventable illnesses are caused by environmental factors. However, limited information exists about the relationship between environmental hazards and chronic diseases, which are responsible for 70 percent of deaths in the U.S. and approximately three-quarters of health care spending. The air that we breathe and the water that we drink can jeopardize our health if contaminated with chemical, biological or other hazards. It is critical that we have the ability to track the relationship between environmental exposures and the incidence and distribution of disease.

Through biomonitoring, which is conducted by the CDC's Environmental Health Laboratory, we can measure with great precision actual levels of chemicals in people's bodies, investigate exposures, and study the causes of diseases. Biomonitoring is an important part of environmental public health tracking.

In 2002, Congress provided the CDC with funding to develop a National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program to coordinate local, state, and federal health agencies' collection of critical data. Using data from the Tracking Network, federal, state and local agencies will be better prepared to develop and evaluate effective public health actions to prevent or control chronic and acute diseases that may be linked to environmental hazards.

CDC selected pilot programs as testing grounds for the tracking program. In Fiscal Year 2005, 21 states and three local health departments were funded for planning and capacity-building

activities, infrastructure enhancement and data linkage demonstration projects. However, due to limited funding, in August 2006 CDC was only able to award funding to 16 states and one city. Clearly, greater investment is necessary in order for CDC to develop a full-fledged, national tracking program and expand the scope of its biomonitoring activities.

It is the federal government that must provide the national leadership and resources to initiate the action required to protect Americans from environmental hazards. With that in mind, **we urge your support for the House-passed funding levels for the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program and the Environmental Health Laboratory.** We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Trust for America's Health
Action Now
American Lung Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Clinical Pathology
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Breast Cancer Fund
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Environmental Defense
Fallon Families
Families Against Cancer and Toxics
Institute for Children's Environmental Health
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Disease Clusters Alliance
National Environmental Health Association
National Research Center for Women & Families
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Tulane Center for Applied Environmental Public Health
Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.
University of Pittsburgh, Graduate School of Public Health –
Academic partner for excellence in Environmental Public Health Tracking
U.S. PIRG