

Northwest PUBLIC HEALTH

From the Editor

Climate Change and Public Health



Boy, does public health have a lot on its plate! It's not enough that the public expects local and state health agencies to ensure that restaurant food is safe or that we are adequately protected against infectious diseases (often without knowing WHO it is expecting this of). It's not enough that we look to the David of public health— with its slingshot-sized budget— to wage battle against the Goliath marketing resources of tobacco companies in order to reduce youth smoking and overall morbidity and mortality.

According to the articles you'll find in this issue of *Northwest Public Health*, public health practitioners and researchers must also anticipate and address the health threats of global climate changes, and of large-scale hippie happenings, and even the challenge of getting the public simply to understand the work and role of public health. Whew!


When Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962, she placed a spotlight on widespread human-induced ecological damage and sparked what is today an international environmental movement. For reasons since debated many times over, this movement evolved not as a part of public health, but as something separate. At the federal level and in most state governments, the Environmental Protection Agency is not within the public health department. The local government body charged with regulation of the effect of land use on the environment is most often a zoning or building department, not a board of health. Even within the advocacy community, organizations that focus on environmental concerns and those that deal with human health issues tend to be separate and distinct.

Richard Hoskin's overview article makes a strong case for ending this artificial and myopic distinction— public health practitioners *must* be concerned about what is happening to the environment. The relationship between climate and the well-being of humans is nowhere more evident than Amy Craver's fascinating discussion of how climate changes are affecting subsistence communities in Alaska. And our need to understand the health implications of drought, changing patterns of vector-borne diseases, and wildfire smoke are well emphasized in the articles by Richard Hoey, Terry Creekmore, and Shannon Therriault and Benjamin Schmidt, respectively. Speaking of the effects of ecological change, what happens when that change is caused by a gathering the size of a small city? Check out Todd Damrow and Christine Hahn's story about how federal and state officials coped with the Rainbow Family's annual conclaves in Montana and Idaho.

Dealing with issues of land, water, and air is not easy, as it inevitably brings forth America's internal conflict between the rights of individuals and the well-being of communities. Public health— especially in rural areas— is often at the center of this tension, as Gregg Grunenfelder's thoughtful *Viewpoint* piece suggests. And then there's that basic challenge I noted at the top ... how do we help the public understand better the business and benefits of public health? Cheryl Juntunen and Linda Powell provide us with one example from Idaho's South Central District Health of how this can be done. Managing Editor Judith Yarrow has

again pulled together a great issue with the excellent support and creative ideas of our Editorial Board and a responsive, extremely helpful group of peer reviewers. If you find the material in *Northwest Public Health* to be interesting or useful— or if you don't— please let us know by writing a letter to the editor for the next issue or a private musing via e-mail, phone, or fax.

Aaron Katz
Editor-in-Chief

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