

Eight Tracking States Collaborate to Increase Radon Awareness and Promote Radon Testing

What was the problem/situation?

In the United States, lung cancer is the second most common type of cancer in both men and women. During 2009, nearly 206,000 Americans were newly diagnosed with lung cancer, and over 158,000 Americans died from lung cancer. Smoking is known to cause 80 to 90 percent of cases of lung cancer, and radon is considered the second leading cause of lung cancer. These two risk factors (tobacco smoke and radon exposure) are synergistic, and it is estimated that 86% of radon-related lung cancer deaths occur among current or former smokers.



How was Tracking involved?

New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Tracking Project Coordinator, Dr. Barbara Goun, and Tracking partners at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) proposed and led the national EPHT special project, “Simultaneous Visualization of Lung Cancer, Smoking, and Radon.” The project was a partnership of eight Tracking grantee states (CO, KS, NH, NJ, OR, UT, VT, and WA) working together to enhance data visualization, publication, and outreach targeted for national Radon Awareness Month, January 2014. The project worked with the CDC’s Tracking Communication team and state-based partners to create and share infographics, maps, outreach materials, and methodology to improve state-based presentation and utilization of sub-county radon potential, smoking prevalence, and lung cancer incidence. The project increased Tracking’s collaboration with state Radon Programs, Cancer Registries, Smoking Cessation Programs, and State Geologists.

What action was taken to resolve the problem?

Nationally, the special project was successful at increasing public awareness about radon in participating states, and in creating new Tracking partnerships. Highlights which resulted from the project included: a new interactive web portal in Vermont showing radon, lung cancer and smoking; new radon maps and enhanced outreach in Kansas; prime time TV news coverage on the project in Kansas and Washington State; improved radon maps in Colorado; a suite of re-usable outreach materials including materials for Facebook, Twitter, a double-sided fact sheet, and an infographic for use by interested states or organizations; and more than 80 media pieces in the eight participating states. At the culmination of the project, a 90 minute CDC-sponsored webinar, titled “EPHT Lung Cancer, Smoking and Radon Project: Eight States Tackle Improving Visualization of Lung Cancer, Smoking and Radon,” was held on May 15th. The webinar had 220 local, state, national and international health and environmental agency attendees. Attendees included representatives from: Health Canada, Radon Outreach; regional and the national branches of the American Lung Association; many state cancer registries; the American Cancer Society; the Italian National Institute of Health; the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Public Health England; and the Canadian Cancer Society. The webinar presentation is available online.

In New Jersey, project activities included: a NJDEP press release; e-mail from NJDOH’s Commissioner urging every local health officer to encourage radon testing in order to prevent lung cancer; and a presentation at the 2014 national CSTE Conference. New Jersey’s outreach activities resulted in 13 media articles, and the number of hits to NJ Tracking’s NJDEP Radon website increased 12% to 11,509 web hits during January 2014. No increase in the number of radon tests completed in New Jersey however could be directly attributed to the enhanced New Jersey outreach activities. While radon tests completed in New Jersey increased each month (from 3,506 completed tests in January 2014 to 6,643 tests in May 2014), there traditionally is a seasonal increase in the spring of each year. NJ Tracking Principal Investigator, Dr. Jerry Fagliano, gave a presentation on the multistate project titled, “Eight States Tackle Improving the Visualization of Lung Cancer Incidence, Smoking Prevalence and Radon Data,” at the 2014 Annual CSTE Conference held in June 2014 in Nashville, Tennessee.

NJSHAD serves as the main data portal for NJDOH, providing public access to data and information from the entire New Jersey Department of Health, and hosts datasets for the New Jersey Environmental Public Health Tracking (NJEPHT) Program. NJSHAD provides static public health indicators which combine data and information, and dynamic custom public health query tools. The functionality, content, and utility of NJSHAD and the NJEPHT portal are constantly being enhanced.

