

Public Health: “A Healthy Business Strategy”

There is a well-known and widely-circulated story entitled “A Day in the Life of Public Health,” which recounts the many, often unseen ways that local citizens benefit from the varied programs and services provided by Public Health agencies year-round. The narrative begins with a clear blue sky that greets us in the morning, and also illustrates Public Health’s concentrated efforts in monitoring air quality and issuing pollution notices when necessary to ensure peoples’ health and prevent potential long-term environmental hazards. The storyline continues with activities that people routinely engage in throughout the day—from child care drop-off to restaurant pit stops to an evening walk in the park complimented by clear lakes and streams. Again, each of these activities reveals footprints of Public Health, which works to maintain safe learning and recreational settings for children, properly handled and prepared meals at retail food establishments, and county-wide water quality monitoring and mitigation on behalf of us all.

In addition to being a fun and insightful read, I raise this story because it offers some important applications for the business community, as well as the general population. After all, our ‘clients’ are other organizations’ clients...and employees, and our programs have far reaching impact on every one of them. To varying degrees, we all dine out at restaurants, enjoy recreational water facilities, spend time in the great outdoors and assemble in public settings. In some instances these activities are incorporated into everyday business operations—such as company picnics, corporate lunches/catered meetings, international travel and employee wellness programs. If unaddressed, potential health threats associated with these activities can result in significant business losses by way of staff absenteeism and resulting declines in work production (e.g., disease and food-borne illness outbreaks.)

Just as businesses are dependent on sufficient income and personnel to sustain operations and services, the El Paso County Health Department is subject to the same rules of economy. Unfortunately, our Department has seen a steep decline in local funding over the past 5-6 years resulting in significant staffing and program shortages. In fact, our current staffing ranks in the lowest 25th percentile for public health agencies serving populations of 500,000-plus. Additionally, the Department’s \$6.40 per capita funding is the lowest in a multi-county region, which averages \$11.50 per capita and peaks at over \$27. And these disparities exist despite our county’s distinction as the most populous in the state.

On Monday, April 7, the El Paso County Department of Health & Environment is hosting its Sixth Annual Meeting at the Pikes Peak Regional Development Center, 2880 International Circle (just east of the Health Department offices) from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. The general public is encouraged to attend this event, which will include informative displays and presentations highlighting the Department’s core programs and services. This gathering will conclude with a ‘State of Public Health’ address posing a pivotal question for our citizens: “Has Local Public Health reached an end of the road or is a new beginning on the horizon?”

This community forum traditionally is well represented by city and county officials, creating a great opportunity for more in-depth discussions on pressing issues and trends impacting the future of Public Health in El Paso County. Please encourage your employees, partnering agencies and their families to attend. People can RSVP for the Annual Meeting by calling 578-3101 or emailing healthinfo@epchealth.org. For additional details or to read “A Day in the Life of Public Health,” visit our website at www.elpasocountyhealth.org.

“Food For Thought.” El Paso County’s Growing Retail Food Industry

Year	Retail Food Facilities	Complaints Received and Investigated
2005	2,274	60
2006	2,300	178
2007	2,400	219
2008 (projected)	2,472	TBD

Publication: Colorado Springs Business Journal Health Quarterly, April 2008