



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

ACTIVE ALERTS FOR A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY: THE CASE OF CARBON MONOXIDE

THE PROBLEM

Late in the evening of December 13, 2014, a teenager passed out after finishing an indoor hockey game in southern Wisconsin. Other players and spectators reported headaches, nausea, vomiting, and dizziness. Local emergency response staff were contacted and conducted an air quality test that revealed dangerous levels of carbon monoxide (CO).

Response staff worked with four area hospitals to triage people for care. In total, 92 people were seen, with two individuals requiring hyperbaric treatment. However, local and state public health officials were not directly notified by incident responders and did not learn of the event until news reports surfaced the next day. Because of this delay, local and state health officials were precluded from providing oversight and assistance in situational assessment and response coordination.

WHAT WE DID

In response to this event, Environmental Public Health Tracking staff realized that the state health department needed a system to alert agency staff when a large-scale chemical exposure event occurs. A review of Tracking data on calls to the Wisconsin Poison Center revealed that multiple CO calls were made to poison center staff during and immediately after the poisoning event. Based on this observation, Wisconsin Poison Center leadership worked with Tracking epidemiologists to create an alert system. This system will send an email to Tracking staff when an anomalous number of poisoning calls occurs within a defined time frame. This system will be refined to include state public health 24-hour on-call chemical emergency staff.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

Tracking staff are now equipped to alert local public health authorities to this kind of event and provide guidance and technical assistance as applicable. This system improves the real-time surveillance and tracking of mass CO poisonings in the state and will provide data that can be used to prevent these events in the future.

Have a question about Poison
Center calls in your community?

We can help!

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608-267-2488

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM
Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

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