



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

OVERCOMING COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES TO IMPROVE WELL TESTING

Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

THE PROBLEM

Well water testing is a complicated topic: homeowners with wells first decide what to test for and how often. After testing, they must interpret sometimes confusing results. Eau Claire City-County Health Department (ECCCHD) staff know communication about well testing is already a challenge, but in their community, many homeowners worry that if their test comes back with a less than ideal result they will be forced to make a change. ECCCHD received funding and technical assistance from the Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking Program to find a better way to reach their audiences.

WHAT EAU CLAIRE CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT DID

First, ECCCHD staff partnered with the Eau Claire County Land Conservation Division (LCD) for assistance. LCD is a trusted source among many in ECCCHD's target audience: farmers and land owners likely to live in rural areas with private wells. These established relationships made it easy for LCD to get the attention of this audience. ECCCHD trained LCD staff to offer well testing during onsite visits, as well as discuss well testing during their workshops.

Next, ECCCHD staff convened the Eau Claire County Nitrate Taskforce, a group made up of private well owners and professionals working on water quality. The Taskforce generated messaging to increase well testing with an emphasis on addressing fears of well owners. One such tactic was reframing "well testing" as a "well checkup." This positive language made well testing seem less intrusive and regulatory.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

ECCCHD staff started using this new messaging immediately in press releases and social media. They will continue to use their partners at LCD and in the Eau Claire County Nitrate Taskforce to discuss communication challenges, brainstorm solutions, and evaluate to see what messages resonate most with target audiences.



Clear communication is key to our success. New messaging and the use of social media have helped us to reach audiences in an innovative way.

AUDREY BOERNER
Project Manager
Eau Claire City-County
Health Department

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dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht | SEPTEMBER 2016 | dhstracking@wi.gov
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