



## Public Health Update

Thursday, November 05, 2009



### Chattahoochee Flood Response

In response to the flooding that occurred in the Atlanta Metro area during the week of September 20th, numerous sewer manholes located along the river as well as actual direct discharge of sewage into the river from over whelmed sewer plants were flooded and overflowing for several days, dumping hundreds of thousands of gallons of raw sewage in to the park. Flood waters contaminated with raw sewage, as well as, the potential for rapid mold growth presented a potentially serious public health issues.

The Public Health Consultant (PHC) travelled to the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area to discuss concerns and consult with park staff that will be cleaning up the flood damage. The park had an all hands meeting where the PHC presented information on several public health topics as briefly outlined below. She also recommended that the river be closed for recreational issues due to public health risk until the sewage issue could be resolved with coliform levels returning to EPA recommended levels. Due to an overwhelmed sewer plant, the county was literally pouring raw sewage into the river, and sewage manholes are totally flooded with water. The county is aware of this issue, and will keep the park informed of the progress in repairing the sewage systems.

### OPH Sprouts Branches

The Office of Public Health (OPH) is a NPS managed, funded, and operated office that provides public health support to parks through environmental health surveys, disease surveillance and response,

emergency preparedness and response, public health protection and promotion, and policy and science guidance.

The NPS OPH has embarked over the last few years on an initiative to develop and maintain an NPS wide disease transmission detection (surveillance) system. A new ten year inter agency agreement expands the divisions role beyond NPS, making the OPH DOI's agent for placing United States Public Health Service officers anywhere in the department or in any of its bureaus. Despite these new developments, there is a desire to ensure that the division's central service of providing on-site evaluation and consultations at NPS units is not diminished. This new structure creates a branch specifically devoted to each of these three needs.

Below are a description of the responsibilities of the three OPH branches:

#### Field Services Branch:

- Actively identify park public health hazards
- Using on-site evaluations, determine the degree of control that park units have over public health hazards
- Provide expert consultative services to assist park unit managers and staff improve visitor protection
- In consultation and coordination with the NPS Biological Resource Management Division, assist park units with the management of zoonotic and vector borne diseases
- Consult on any and all public health related park specific issues
- In consultation and coordination with the OPH Epidemiology Branch, manage park specific outbreak response
- Provide informal and formal training to park staff on public health issues
- Assist with NPS and PHS emergency response

#### Epidemiology Branch:

- Establish and maintain formal and informal disease surveillance systems

- Respond to case reports and outbreaks, in collaboration with public health consultants and local, state, and federal health agencies
- Conduct research activities to improve our understanding of and ability to limit human disease transmission within the NPS system
- Provide subject matter expertise on medical and public health issues to officials from NPS and other sister bureaus within the DOI
- Serve as a liaison between NPS and other health agencies for public health planning, preparedness, and emergency response
- Provide advice to the Director, OPH about public health priorities and emerging issues

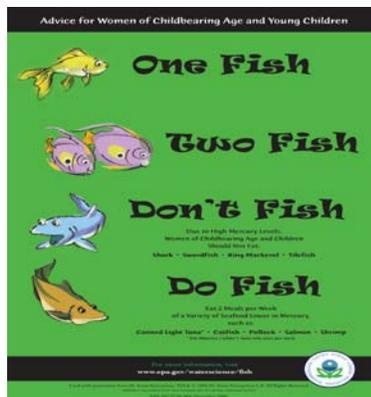
#### Commissioned Corps Operations Branch:

- Carrying out the day-to-day management and administration of major commissioned corps operational functions including officer relations, promotions, compensation, benefits, grievances, effectiveness reports and recruitment
- Serving as liaison and advocate for all PHS officers assigned to DOI
- Providing consultation and subject matter expertise on all policies governing the assignment of PHS commissioned corps officers
- Setting duty and cost appropriate billets for all positions, benchmarked against NPS HR rated PD's
- Establishing and maintaining all hiring policies and procedures, ensuring and objective hiring process focused on providing quality personnel for assignment to the NPS OPH and throughout DOI
- Ensuring equal opportunity and diversity
- Establishing and operating an awards program that recognizes officers for their

- accomplishments and contributions
- Communicating with the VRP and NPS budget office
  - Work with the OPH Director to develop financial plans, manage budgets and coordinate budget requests
  - Maintain all fiscal records and reports
  - Provide oversight for federal records management

Additional to the branches is the Assistant to the Director for Science that provides science support and oversight for the OPH. This position supports OPH through:

- Supporting field staff and national level division activities
- Producing science guidance documents
- Providing for peer review and quality assurance of division science-based products and communication
- Liaisoning with other NPS science subject areas and other federal agencies
- Serving as a liaison between NPS and other health agencies for public health planning, preparedness, and emergency response
- Providing advice to the Director, OPH about public health priorities and emerging issues



## Mercury and Fish Consumption Advisories are Focus of DOI Policy

The OPH is coordinating a DOI-wide communication of fish consumption advisory workgroup that is working

towards converting U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Director's Order (DO) 190 on fish consumption advisories to DOI policy. The purpose of this policy is to set forth Departmental policy for properties of the United States under the jurisdiction of DOI or one of its bureaus that allow fishing to provide information to advise anglers of fish and shellfish consumption advisories and the risks to human health associated with eating specific fish and shellfish caught in those waters. Current members of the policy advisory group include National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance, U.S. Geological Survey, and Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Fishers utilize DOI lands to catch and consume fish that may high levels of contaminants. Fish advisories inform people about the risks of consuming fish caught in specific lakes, rivers, and coastal waters. Advisories may indicate that people should restrict their consumption of fish, or they may advise that fish from certain waters are safe to eat. Advisories from FDA, EPA, and state governments exist and the DOI policy would ensure that fishers would be aware of applicable national and local advisories.

After a draft of the policy was developed, the policy underwent a vetting process. The workgroup then reviewed and discussed the formal comments submitted by the bureaus. Once the policy is finalized, the Assistant Secretaries and Commissioner need to sign the policy before it is adopted into the DOI departmental manual.

The policy asks the heads of bureaus and offices to appoint a liaison with appropriate technical expertise to answer questions about fish advisories and designates the OPH as responsible for providing technical assistance to all DOI bureau and office liaisons on contaminant issues as it relates to potential human health hazards associated with fishing and shellfishing.

Additional questions regarding the DOI-wide communication of fish consumption policy, please contact:

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## What's Cooking Up this Holiday in Food Safety?

As we head towards the season of holiday parties and buffets, there are several basic food safety steps we can all observe to make our holiday season a healthy one! The following are tips from CDC's website on holiday cooking:

- **Clean:** Wash hands and food-contact surfaces often.
- **Separate:** Don't cross contaminate — don't let bacteria spread from one food product to another, particularly with raw meat, poultry, and seafood. Keep these foods and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods.
- **Cook:** Cook to proper temperatures to kill harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate promptly. Refrigerate foods quickly keeps most harmful bacteria from growing. Refrigerators should be set at 40 F and the freezer at 0F.



In Partnership for nearly 100 years, the National Park Service and the United States Public Health Service have worked together to protect the health of visitors in Americas Parks!