# Public Health Talks ENVIRONMENTAL TRACKING

American Public Health Association

## ABOUT THIS TOOLBOX

**Today, millions of Americans live in communities where the connection between environmental hazards and public health has been tracked.**

The air we breathe, the water we drink, the way we live in the environment around us – these are day-to-day issues that impact every community. Yet for years, the hard questions about the ties between environmental factors and health impacts meant sorting through studies of inconsistent and incomparable data. It meant overburdened public health departments spending months trying to find answers so citizens could understand the health outcomes they were experiencing in their communities. And, too often, it meant public policy decisions made in the absence of meaningful data, especially when it came to the impact of the environment on chronic disease.

**The Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network) can help change all that, but only if its value is understood and communicated to the public and decision makers.** That's what this toolbox is designed to help you do.

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## USING THIS TOOLBOX

Qualitative research into America's public health community identified the need for a new way of talking about the Tracking Network. Opinions divided between those who described the network as a currently useful tool, and those who view it as a work in progress. Everyone acknowledged the importance of this resource and felt it would prove invaluable over time. But several stakeholders expressed that they wanted meaningful ways to express the Tracking Network's value *today*. Addressing this concern means emphasizing not just outcomes, but the inherent structural value of the Tracking Network – and doing it in the present tense.

This toolbox includes outreach materials to help you reach out to members of your community, as well as state, local and national decision makers. The customizable press release, email pitch, OpEd, Letter to the Editor and social media memo can be modified to communicate both breaking environmental tracking news; as well as proactive data releases. In addition, this toolbox includes a methodology for collecting success stories of the Tracking Network in action.

## THE CONNECTION FRAMEWORK

Because of the nature of your work, you are perhaps best positioned to understand and communicate the value of the Tracking Network. You hear community concerns. You may even be tasked with interpreting data meaningfully, and implementing solutions to public health problems or concerns. Drawing these sorts of connections is what public health is all about – and is exactly what the Tracking Network makes possible – not as a potential, but at this very moment. This **CONNECTION FRAMEWORK** is designed to give you four ways to explain the value of the Tracking Network, today. They are:

- **The Tracking Network CONNECTS what is known about where environmental hazards exist, where people are getting sick and how targeted action can protect health, reduce illness and save lives.**
- **The Tracking Network CONNECTS communities to information, faster and more efficiently than ever before.**
- **The Tracking Network CONNECTS scientific data in one framework that everyone can use**.
- **The Tracking Network CONNECTS decision makers with the information they need to make choices.**

By framing the Tracking Network in the context of the Connection Framework, this toolbox will help communities and decision makers understand the value of this critical resource.

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# *PUBLIC HEALTH TALKS ENVIRONMENTAL TRACKING*

## THE TRACKING NETWORK

- **We know that the air we breathe, the water we drink, the way we live in the environment around us – all dramatically impact the health of people in our community.**

- **Our community is part of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network that makes connections between where we live, and what environmental hazards could make us sick.**

- **The Tracking Network works to save lives and protect people from environmental hazards.**

## THE CONNECTION FRAMEWORK

- **The Tracking Network CONNECTS what is known about where environmental hazards exist, where people are getting sick and how targeted action can protect health, reduce illness and save lives.**

    - The Tracking Network's great achievement is bringing together what we know about our health and environment.

    - The Tracking Network does it in a way that gives us our best look at environmental impacts on chronic illnesses. An estimated 125 million Americans suffer from at least one chronic condition. Three out of every four health care dollars are spent on the treatment of chronic diseases.

- **The Tracking Network CONNECTS communities to information, faster and more efficiently than ever before.**

    - Today, we can get answers in minutes that once took months – which saves money and time.

- **The Tracking Network CONNECTS scientific data in one framework that everyone can use**.

- It has provided a new standard for environmental public health data that will only grow over time.

- **The Tracking Network CONNECTS policymakers with the information they need to make decisions.**

  - It quickly provides context and data where once there were only assumptions and theories.

  - The result is better-informed public policy.

## HOW WE GOT HERE

- For years, we only had limited data about how health and environmental factors are connected. CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Network is designed to change all that.

  - Where information did exist, it was scattered in state agencies and buried in scientific journals. Drawing conclusions meant spending many hours to pull together often inconsistent and incomparable data.

  - Overburdened public health departments spent months trying to find answers so citizens could understand the health outcomes they were experiencing in their communities.

  - Too often, public policy decisions were made in the absence of meaningful data, especially when it came to the impact of the environment on chronic disease.

- The online Environmental Public Health Tracking Network launched in 2009, and today CDC works with 23 states and New York City.

- Today, millions of Americans live in communities where the connection between environmental hazards and public health is tracked.

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# COMMUNICATING THE CONNECTION:
# CAPTURING SUCCESS STORIES OF THE TRACKING NETWORK IN ACTION

This toolbox exists to help you communicate the value of the Environmental Public Health Tracking Network, today – and how the impact of public health initiatives made possible by the Tracking Network will ensure it is able to continue and expand its mission into the future.

CDC and APHA urge you to capture and share your work with your colleagues and peers, in your community and across the country. To help share these success stories in a format that makes the importance of the Tracking Network clear to multiple audiences, the Connection Framework is designed to provide a useful framing device. Below are four steps to communicating about your work:

1. **Pick Your Framework:** Think about what your work with the Tracking Network achieved, and then identify the most appropriate frame in the Connection Framework:

    - The Tracking Network CONNECTS what is known about where environmental hazards exist, where people are getting sick and how targeted action can protect health, reduce illness and save lives.
    - The Tracking Network CONNECTS communities to information, faster and more efficiently than ever before.
    - The Tracking Network CONNECTS scientific data in one framework that everyone can use.
      The Tracking Network CONNECTS decision makers with the information they need.
2. **Identify the Finding:** Begin your case study by clearly articulating the environmental hazard and the health impacts at stake, in the context of the appropriate frame.

3. **Narrative with Telling Detail:** Provide a short narrative of your work with the Tracking Network, including where possible a "telling detail" to humanize your story.

4. **The Outcome:** Finish your case study with a description of the results of your work, mirroring the appropriate frame from the Connection Framework.

**In the pages that follow are several sample success stories, written according to these guidelines and influenced by the Connection Framework. CDC and APHA would be honored to share your success stories with the world. You can send them to [CONTACT] and [CONTACT].**

## CASE STUDY:
## CHANGING WHERE AND HOW NEW YORK THINKS ABOUT ASTHMA

**RELEVANT CONNECTION FRAME:**

***The Tracking Network CONNECTS what is known about where there are environmental hazards, where people are getting sick and where targeted action can protect health, reduce illness and save lives.***

Kids in East Harlem are twice as likely to have asthma as neighbors just a few blocks away in the Upper East Side. Serious asthma episodes can be caused by a variety of factors, including tobacco smoke, dust mites, furred and feathered animals, certain molds, chemicals, and strong odors in the environment. Children who live in low-income neighborhoods, like East Harlem, are also at greater risk for developing asthma.

The New York City Environmental Public Health Tracking Network teamed up with the East Harlem Asthma Center of Excellence to make the connection between their community and asthma. The NYC Tracking Network mapped childhood asthma hospital stays by neighborhood and studied these stays over time. They found that hospital stays are four times higher for East Harlem kids than for those living in the city's highest-income neighborhoods.

NYC tracking data also showed that asthma hospital stays for children jump in the fall. Now, health department workers send special messages to doctors and other health care providers via the city's Health Alert Network, encouraging them to update patients' asthma control plans. Since this activity started, there has been a drop in rates of asthma-related hospital stays among New York City's children.

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## CASE STUDY:

### RELEVANT CONNECTION FRAME:

***The Tracking Network CONNECTS communities to information, faster and more efficiently than ever before.***

Communities in California's Imperial County had serious concerns because of a nearby perchlorate factory that is no longer operating. Perchlorate is a chemical used in rocket fuel. It is believed to disrupt the thyroid's ability to produce hormones needed for normal growth and development.

California's Tracking Network, state public health leaders and local community advocates wanted the final word on their perchlorate exposure, so they conducted biomonitoring—directly measuring exposure through blood or urine samples.

The analysis provided hard data to the community: the average estimated perchlorate dose was 70 percent higher than the national average. All of the participants were given their results, had the opportunity to meet with the project staff to ask questions, and were offered the opportunity to visit with a local doctor to have follow-up testing if needed, for free. With this information, the community and policy makers are better informed and can make better decisions about protecting their health going forward.

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## CASE STUDY:
## THE DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL BRINGS DATA TOGETHER, FAST

### RELEVANT CONNECTION FRAME:

***The Tracking Network CONNECTS scientific data in one framework that everyone can use.***

The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill of April 20, 2010, dumped 240 million gallons of oil into the Gulf. The spill triggered a number of unique environmental impacts that posed major risks to public health in Louisiana and all along the Gulf of Mexico.

During the critical post-crisis period, experts at the Louisiana Tracking Program developed an oil spill response plan alongside CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health as well as agencies from other affected Gulf Coast states. This team of experts developed new survey and map-based tracking systems to capture the unique health complaints and environmental impacts resulting from the spill.

Using the data from this new section of the tracking system, public health professionals in Louisiana were able to notify the Occupational Safety and Health Administration about workplace exposures and health complaints from emergency response workers. They also used the tracking system in training sessions to educate spill response workers, residents, and local health care providers about potential health effects and ways to avoid exposure to dangers and chemicals.

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## CASE STUDY:
## NEW DATA MAKES NEW CARBON MONOXIDE POLICY IN MAINE

### RELEVANT CONNECTION FRAME:

***The Tracking Network CONNECTS policymakers with the information they need to make choices.***

Carbon monoxide poisoning is a serious risk wherever homes rely on gas-powered furnaces and water heaters. Until 2008, Maine did not have an active tracking system capable of recognizing high risk areas for carbon monoxide poisoning, and policymakers were operating without solid data to make decisions.

Maine's environmental public health team created a state-wide surveillance system for carbon monoxide poisoning. The system uses multiple data sources as well as geographic information to identify groups that are at a high risk for potential exposure. In addition, tracking staff developed a module for the state's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System that allows them to track carbon monoxide detector use.

The Maine Tracking Program found that almost every case of carbon monoxide poisoning in the state was associated with not having a carbon monoxide detector. This led policymakers to quickly pass new legislation requiring carbon monoxide detectors in all rental units and in single family homes, whenever a property is sold or when there is any sort of renovation. The law went into effect in September 2009.

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**
[INSERT DATE]

Contact: [INSERT CONTACT NAME]
[INSERT CONTACT PHONE]

# [INSERT PLACE] Public Health Leaders: New Analysis Details Connection Between [Environmental Hazard] and [Impact]

[INSERT PLACE] – A new analysis released today by [INSERT AGENCY] provides information about the impact of [ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD] on the health of our community. The [NAME OF RESEARCH] found that [TOP FINDING].

"[INSERT AREA RESIDENTS] deserve to know about how their environment impacts their health, and today's analysis shows that [RESTATE TOP FINDING]," said [INSERT SPOKESPERSON]. "This new understanding is possible because [COMMUNITY] is part of CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network that makes connections between where we live and what environmental hazards could make us sick."

Among the key findings:

[INSERT BACKGROUND ON ISSUE, AND DATA AS AVAILABLE:]

- Specific data findings on connection
- Background on environmental hazard
- Background on source of health impact data

"This new analysis brings together our best understanding of [HAZARD] and [IMPACT]," said [INSERT SPOKESPERSON]. "Our hope is that it can help inform policy decisions going forward, providing context and data where once there were only assumptions and theories. With the insight provided by the Tracking Network, our community can develop targeted action to protect health, reduce illness and save lives."

[INSERT AGENCY BOILERPLATE HERE]

CDC's National Environmental Health Tracking Network connects what is known about where environmental hazards exist, where people are getting sick and how targeted action can protect health, reduce illness and save lives. The national Tracking Network launched in 2009, and today CDC works with 23 states and New York City on this project.

# # #

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# *EMAIL SAMPLE PITCH*

[REPORTER] –

As you probably know, members of our community have expressed concerns about the connection between [HAZARD] and [IMPACT]. This is especially important as [INSERT RELEVANT POLICY DEBATE].

**As supporters of environmental health, we work at the intersection of community concerns and solid data. Today, our community is part of an Environmental Public Health Tracking Network that makes connections between where we live, and what environmental hazards could make us sick.**

Recently, we conducted a new analysis of data available through the [GRANTEE] Tracking Network, and we want to make sure you have access to this important information:

[INSERT BACKGROUND ON ISSUE, AND DATA AS AVAILABLE:]

- Specific data findings on connection
- Background on environmental hazard
- Background on source of health impact data

This new analysis brings together our best understanding of [HAZARD] and [IMPACT]. Our hope is that it can help inform policy decisions going forward, providing context and data where once there were only assumptions and theories. With the insight provided by the Tracking Network, our community can develop targeted actions to protect health, reduce illness and save lives.

I encourage you to write on this important issue and am available to talk further. [ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND ON THIS ISSUE IS ATTACHED.] Don't hesitate to contact me for additional information, and thanks for your time.

Best,

[NAME]

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# *OP-ED TEMPLATE LANGUAGE*

The air we breathe, the water we drink, the way we live in the environment around us have a significant impact on our health and our community. Right now, as [INSERT RELEVANT POLICY DEBATE], [INSERT RESIDENTS] have questions about the connection between [HAZARD] and [IMPACT]. They deserve answers.

**Today, our community is part of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network) that makes connections between where we live, and what environmental hazards could make us sick. And we now know that** [TOP FINDING].

For years, the hard questions about the ties between environmental factors and health impacts meant sorting through studies of inconsistent and incomparable data. It meant overburdened public health departments spending months trying to find answers so citizens could understand the health outcomes they were experiencing in their communities. It also meant that, far too often, public policy decisions were made in the absence of meaningful data, especially when it came to the impact of the environment on chronic disease.

Thanks to the Tracking Network, all that has changed. Spearheaded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and thanks to efforts by state and local public health leaders, today we know that:

[INSERT BACKGROUND ON ISSUE, AND DATA AS AVAILABLE:]

- Specific data findings on connection
- Background on environmental hazard
- Background on source of health impact data

**As supporters of environmental health, we work at the intersection of community concerns and solid data.** This new analysis should inform policy decisions going forward, providing context and data where once there were only assumptions and theories. With the insight provided by the Tracking Network, our community can develop targeted action to protect health, reduce illness and save lives.

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# *SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR*

**LTE #1**

Your recent article ([INSERT ARTICLE NAME AND DATE]) on [POLICY DEBATE/ENVIRONMENT OR HEALTH ISSUE] demonstrated the importance of understanding the connection between [HAZARD] and [IMPACT]. As supporters of environmental health, we work at the intersection of community concerns and solid data.

Our elected officials need the best possible data as they make these decisions – and luckily, we have it. Our community is part of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network) that makes connections between where we live, and what environmental hazards could make us sick. It shows that [INSERT TOP FINDING, HAZARD AND IMPACT]

With the insight provided by the [GRANTEE] Tracking Network, our community can develop targeted action to protect health, reduce illness and save lives.

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**LTE #2**

[INSERT RESIDENTS] have expressed concerns about [HAZARD] ([INSERT ARTICLE NAME AND DATE]), and they deserve answers. Data that is publicly available from the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network [OR [GRANTEE] TRACKING NETWORK] shows that [TOP FINDING].

For years, the hard questions about the ties between environmental factors and health impacts meant sorting through studies of inconsistent and incomparable data. It meant overburdened public health departments spending months trying to find answers so citizens could understand the health outcomes they were experiencing in their communities. And, too often, it meant public policy decisions made in the absence of meaningful data.

Thanks to the [GRANTEE}Tracking Network, that has changed. We hope the knowledge we are able to provide today is reflected in informed public policy decisions tomorrow.

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**LTE #3**

[INSERT COMMUNITY] is taking important new steps to make connections between where we live, and what environmental hazards could make us sick. Our community is part of the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network) that connects scientific data about the air we breathe, the water we drink and the environment we live in – with information about where people are experiencing impacts and illness. And it brings it together in one framework that everyone can use. Today, we can get answers in minutes that once took months – which saves money and time.

Data and analysis from [INSERT GRANTEE]'s Tracking Network is available online at [INSERT URL], and [INSERT PUBLIC HEALTH BODY] can work with you to answer any questions you may have. This is an important public health resource, and as our community [INSERT LOCAL ISSUE], we should make the most of it.

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# CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO THEIR TRACKING NETWORK DATA
## USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO DELIVER TARGETED INFORMATION

As you have seen elsewhere in this toolbox, one of the guiding frames around this effort is to communicate that "the Tracking Network CONNECTS communities to information, faster and more efficiently than ever before." Not incidentally, this is a good description of the power of social media in general.

Social media has become a critical communications pathway for reaching individuals with relevant and targeted information and engaging in dialogue around current issues. This makes social media outlets a dynamic delivery vehicle for material from the Tracking Network. This document is intended to provide key decision makers with meaningful tactics for sharing information about – and from – this critical resource.

### YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Many environmental health supporters around the country are now on social media, connecting with community leaders, advocates and policy makers. Whether you are experienced or just getting started, the Tracking Network provides a powerful tool to engage these key stakeholders.

The first step toward meaningful social media outreach is to establish your own communications pathways, and understand the landscape in which you will be communicating.

- Choose one messenger to be the primary face of your community's public health professionals on social media. It may be an individual or departmental account, and other accounts may exist or be created in the future – but you should choose one as the main mechanism for communicating about the Tracking Network.

- If you or your department are not on Facebook and Twitter, you can join at:
  - www.facebook.com
  - www.twitter.com/signup

- Explore existing organizations and entities in your community that currently have a presence on Facebook and Twitter. These may include PTAs, environmental organizations, and policymakers. Once you find the most appropriate organizations for your topics, you can Like, Follow or Friend

them through social media channels. Take note of the top issue areas on which each engage – and which are most focused on environmental public health.

- On Twitter, "Follow" @CDC_EPHTracking, @cdcgov and @publichealth.

- On Facebook, "Like" https://www.facebook.com/CDCEPHTracking and https://www.facebook.com/AmericanPublicHealthAssociation

- In addition, other key public health influencers on Twitter include:
  - @cdcgov
  - @rwjf_pubhealth
  - @publichealth
  - @nphw
  - @phtwitjc
  - @cdcinjury
  - @gohealthypeople
  - @hhs_drkoh
  - @aphaannualmtg
  - @harvardhsph
  - @rwjf
  - @samhsagov
  - @johnshopkinssph
  - @cdcespanol
  - @theatlantichlth
  - @aidsgov
  - @bacigalupe
  - @cdc_ehealth
  - @robinpregnancy
  - @urbandata
  - @katet_health
  - @hhsgov
  - @risalavizzo
  - @gabrielscally
  - @lisagualtieri

- Beyond Facebook and Twitter, explore key social hubs in your community where conversations may be taking place.
  - Many of the organizations described above, such as PTAs or civic associations, may have active public message boards.
  - Local news outlets are becoming gathering places for civil society online. Explore forums and comment sections on local newspaper websites, or even standalone locally focused sites.

## REACHING YOUR COMMUNITY

Social media thrives on targeted, local information. The Tracking Network provides exactly that sort of information and makes it shareable online. Use social media to augment the traditional media outreach detailed in this toolbox, by highlighting actual Tracking Network findings where possible.

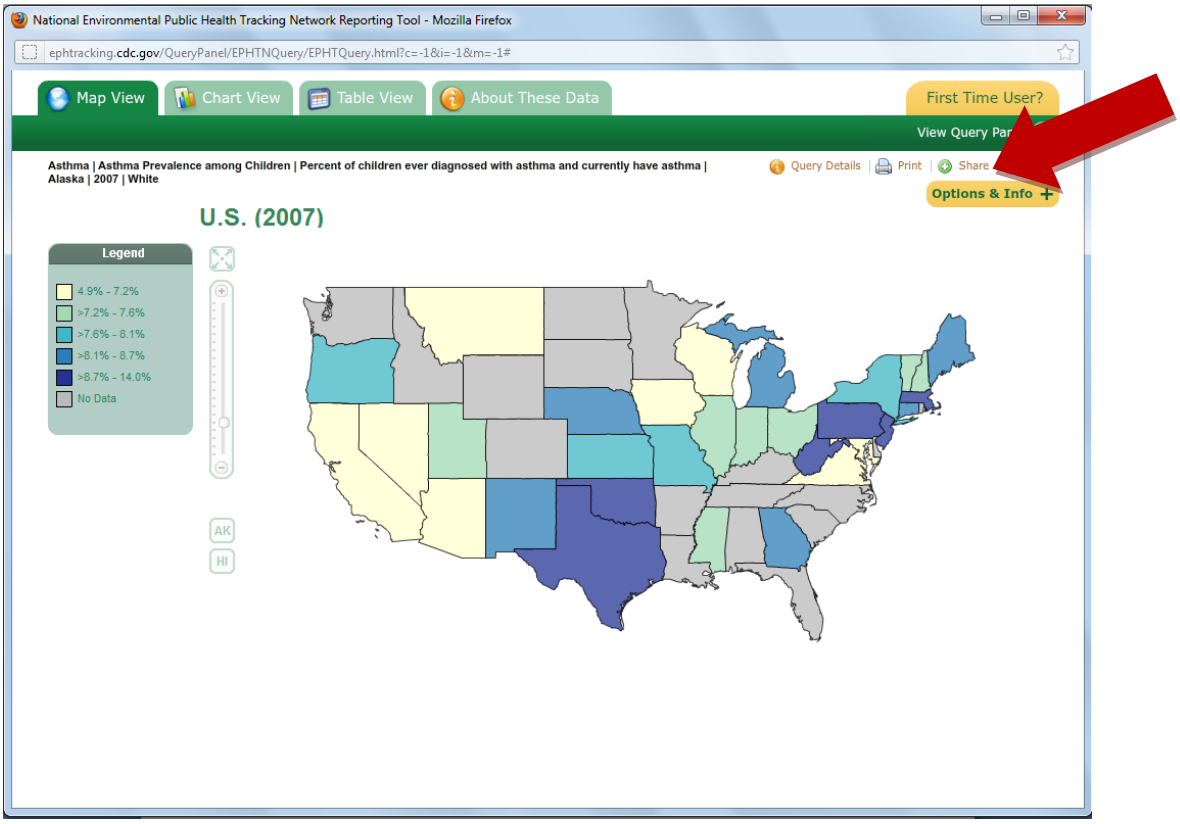
- **Rules of Thumb.** Before reaching out on social media, consider:
  - Creating an account at http://www.bit.ly to provide custom shortened links that let you track click-throughs.

- Using hash tags ("#") in front of specific words that relate to larger issues which could lead to broader readership. When discussing issues or data relevant to the larger community of public health professionals, be sure to use the hashtag #CDCEPHT. Other popular hashtags include #publichealth, #health and #pollution.
- Keeping twitter posts shorter than the 140-character limit to allow easy retweeting.

- **Leverage Existing Outreach and Traditional Media Placement.** Any time you send out proactive content via press release, or respond to a news article or development via Letter to the Editor or OpEd, promote both the content itself and (eventually) your published response via Facebook and Twitter.
  - For information release:
    - Sample Tweet: "New data shows #perchlorate levels in Imperial County http://bit.ly/Opkt2x 70% above nat'l average"
    - Sample Facebook Post: "California's Tracking Network tested Imperial County citizens for blood levels of perchlorate, which can cause thyroid problems. New finding shows levels elevated 70% over national average." Include link to http://bit.ly/Opkt2x
  - For appearance of story:
    - Sample Tweet: "IV Press: State Urges Feds to Clean Up #Perchlorate http://bit.ly/Oilki4 #CDCEPHT
    - Sample Facebook Post: "California calls on Feds to clean up perchlorate, which can cause thyroid problems. Tracking Network research showed elevated 70% over national average." Include link to http://bit.ly/Oilki4.

- **Outreach to Stakeholders on Ongoing Basis.** One of the enormous benefits of the Tracking Network is its wealth of relevant, local data. On an ongoing basis, introduce localized information into the debate – even if not the topic of current discussion, to stimulate conversation and demonstrate the connection. One option is to use the widely-employed #ecomonday hash tag to insert local findings into the conversation, or engage with local stakeholders.
  - Direct, ongoing communication with members of local media can create long-term engagement that results in continuing coverage. Options include posting on a local health reporter's blog, webpage, or the news station's website if they solicit news stories. In addition, you may also want to post links to the release of new and exciting data on relevant stakeholder's websites or Facebook pages.

- **Use Social Media to Answer Community Questions**. The public availability of the Tracking Network online is one of its most useful features – but its navigation can be tricky for lay audiences. Through your existing communication with the community and through #ecomonday outreach, encourage community members to tweet or Facebook queries for the tracking network. Where possible, respond with actual output from the online tool – there is a "share" button on the upper right hand corner of the data output screen which can easily move content through social media:




- Be sure to take the resulting URL to www.bit.ly to shorten it for use in social media.
- A twitter "Tracking Chat" to roll out new and exciting data can mobilize your engaged social media network. In addition, if your outreach through social media indicates a high ongoing level of interest, schedule a monthly twitter "Tracking Chat" to review queries and provide direct links of data runs.