Environmental Health Literacy and Water Quality Toolkit:
Improving knowledge of rights for healthier water in tribal communities

Miranda Margetts, MS & Vanessa W Simonds, ScD – Department of Health & Human Development, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717

BACKGROUND
Access to information on environmental health laws and policies plays a crucial role in enhancing a community’s environmental health literacy and health outcomes.

**Water quality = Public health + Environmental Health**

The legal framework surrounding water quality is complicated. Various Federal, State and Tribal laws and policies regarding environmental health and water quality exist on tribal lands. Understanding the key goals of these laws is one means to protecting the right to clean water and improving health – for both adults and youths.

METHOD
Relevant literature was collated and analyzed to establish the key areas to be addressed, from the following sources:
- Academic and legal databases,
- Policies, legislation and commentary from tribal, state and federal environmental health departments and committees,
- Policies and existing tools from environmental health law advocacy and water quality organizations,
- Youth focused water education resources.

METHODS
Stakeholder interviews
- With representatives from: EPA, state water agencies, tribal law experts, water law and policy experts, National Congress of American Indians, the CDC’s Tribal Public Health Law branch and tribal community members.
- Open-ended format designed to elicit information about the current legal and policy landscape
- Determine the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in protecting water quality on tribal lands.

Content approval by community, legal and policy experts.
- Consultation on documents for review, feedback and relevance

RESULTS
General Themes
Tribal environmental health literacy requires attention and is complex due to the jurisdictional legal layers

Many tribal communities grappling with issues related to water quality – some similar, some different

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of raising awareness of relevant rights to improve health outcomes.

Broader guidance as to ‘how’ a community obtains such information is lacking.

Lack of regulation of private well water use problematic

DISCUSSION AND DISSEMINATION
- Complex legal and broader environmental, economic and policy questions surround the issue of water quality in many communities.
- The lack of environmental health literacy awareness in relation to water quality is resulting in devastating short and long term impacts on Native American communities.
- This knowledge-based toolkit is designed to assist tribal community members to make informed environmental health decisions.
- This toolkit can be tailored to be regionally specific and enhance community education efforts.
- The key content is general enough to be broadly applicable with the capacity to be widely disseminated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- Montana State University - Faculty and affiliates, including Montana Water Center
- National Congress of American Indians
- Indian Health Services – Office of Environmental Health and Engineering
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- Centers for Disease Control – Tribal Public Health Law
- Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals