

# DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

# ENVIROMATTERS

December 20, 2006

## Agencies Update Agreement for Better Coordination in Environmental Health

The past four years of this administration have seen the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) use a collaborative management style in an effort to foster effective communication and coordination among governments – local, state, regional and national. MDE attained another benchmark in collaboration this month with the signing an updated memorandum of understanding (MOU) with its principal partners in environmental health protection.

### Guidelines for Collective Activities

MDE, The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene DHMH, and local health departments are responsible for an array of environmental health services in Maryland. Their efforts often complement and sometimes overlap one another. The MOU between these partners is an important statement of intent and an operational guideline for collective activities throughout the state. Topics addressed in the MOU range from air and water protection to waste management, laboratory services, lead poisoning prevention, disease investigation, and local environmental health, among others.

### Changing Times Call for Drastic Measures

Changes have occurred in the way we address environmental problems since the MOU was last updated in 1999. For instance, in the wake of the 9/11 attack and Hurricane Katrina, the state revised its organization for public health preparedness and disaster response, and formalized its policies in the Maryland Emergency Operations Plan. The MOU restates these strengthened policies and MDE's role in environmental monitoring, countermeasures, and environmental restoration.

Capacity management of the state's water supplies and wastewater treatment facilities has become a vital concern for community growth in recent years. The updated MOU identifies the particular roles of MDE and local health authorities in certifying capacity and issuing permits for these systems.

### Top-down, Bottom-up Communication

To organize the top-down-bottom-up communication required in environmental health, the parties to the MOU promise to coordinate with one another in major enforcement actions, regulatory changes, data sharing, strategic planning, legal representation, and press announcements. The Environmental Health Liaison Committee, with representatives from all 3 groups, holds bi-monthly meetings to resolve issues as they arise.

The updated MOU represents eight months of dialogue by workgroups and consideration by staff in the State and local departments. It reaffirms our commitment to interagency coordination and efficient environmental health services in Maryland.

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