HEALTH STUDY OPTIONS

LEARN THE BASICS

Start by watching the video Expert Advice on Health Studies to learn about different kinds of studies, and the pros and cons of each. The resource Environment and Health gives a more in-depth overview of environmental health studies.

You can read and watch stories of communities who have faced similar problems:

> Will the Health Study Prove Liability? is a video about a health study that didn't turn out to be so easy.
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> Read "Counting and Calculating" on p. 19 of the Spring 2011 issue of the educational magazine The Change Agent.
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> See an example of a health study summary from North Carolina on BREDL's web site.

GATHER DATA

Has there been testing for contamination, and did they find particular contaminants? Even without testing, maybe you know what kinds of chemicals were used on a particular site? Go to the ATSDR's Public Data and find the CDC's ToxFAQs. The CDC keeps information about each contaminant, and what kind of health problems each could cause. If the contamination is

known to be toxic, you don't have to prove that it is causing health problems. Follow these links to learn more about air or soil and water quality testing.

Look up health data for your area on SfA's Public Data page in the CDC WONDER database. Look especially for health problems associated with the kind of contamination you think is present. If you're particularly concerned about cancer, see Guide to State Cancer Profiles.

A caution about using existing health data: Most government data is kept by county. If the contamination only affects a small number of people in a county with a large population, the government data won't help you much. If the contamination affects most people in the county, though, it could be helpful.

Contact local hospitals and clinics to find out if there have been any changes in health problems over the period of time in question. Compare those data to hospital data from another area with no contamination. Hospitals may not want to give you information due to privacy issues. If that happens, contact public health researchers at a nearby college or university. Hospitals regularly provide data for academic research.

EXPLORE STRATEGIES

If you can't find any data yourself, you might decide to conduct your own study. Start with the workshop A First Look at Health Studies. That workshop can help a group review the the major health study types and plenty of case studies, to make the decision about whether or not to pursue a study. If you do, and you're not already connected to an environmental advocacy

organization, you should consult with one before starting. The medical or public health school at a local university may also be able to conduct a study.

If you were able to get health data, you might need help interpreting it. Pieces of the Risk Puzzle can help you think about ways people might be exposed to contamination. You can compare disease incidence or prevalence rates to statewide or national averages using Compare to Standards.

MAKE YOUR CASE

When you have the key facts you want to communicate to decision-makers or to the community, Communicating with Numbers helps you make your case effectively in words, images, and fact sheets.