

Environmental Health Regulatory Food Safety Program Capacity Assessment

*Initial Assessment Results Summary
April 2011*

*Summary assessment report compiled by
the National Environmental Health
Association (NEHA).*



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Introduction

NEHA and AFDO have been asked to conduct an EH regulatory food safety program capacity assessment by CIFOR. CIFOR members are interested in knowing what impacts budget cuts may be having on the capacity of local and state regulatory food safety programs—and specifically on those programs that conduct environmental investigations during foodborne disease outbreaks. Having completed workforce capacity assessments for epidemiology and laboratories, there was a remaining need to do an assessment for EH personnel. Additionally, with state and local EH programs experiencing drastic budget reductions in the current economic climate, there was consensus about the urgency of completing this remaining assessment. This assessment is intended for EH and regulatory food safety managers and directors who oversee regulatory food safety programs within local, tribal, and state departments that conduct environmental investigations during foodborne disease outbreaks.

Because of the urgency to have basic information quickly, an initial assessment was created using Zoomerang. The assessment was both anecdotal and qualitative and addressed EH foodborne illness investigation capacity issues such as fewer staff/resources, less training, less capacity. NEHA, AFDO, and NACCHO disseminated the assessment to EH and food safety managers and directors. The assessment was launched March 24, 2011, and closed April 8, 2011.

NEHA announced the assessment through e-mail to its state and regional affiliates, Certified Professional in Food Safety credentialed list, CDC's EH listserv, NEHA's e-News electronic membership newsletter, and on its Web site, Facebook page, and through Twitter. AFDO directly e-mailed the assessment to its list of state food safety program managers and are encouraging everyone to complete it. NACCHO shared the assessment with its food safety distribution list, EH distribution lists, and EH advisory groups. It was also included in their EH newsletter that went out the week of April 4.

At the close of the survey, 457 individuals visited the Zoomerang assessment link with 157 completing and 30 partially completing the assessment. The following information is a summary of the feedback received through the assessment. For more in-depth information, please reference the complete assessment results report.

5. If you indicated in Question 4 that programs have been decreased, increased, or outsourced, please identify these programs and the extent in which they have been affected.

6. *Please indicate any impacts experienced in your food safety program’s inspections over the last two years. Check all that apply.

- More inspections conducted
- No change to the number of inspections conducted
- Fewer inspections conducted
- No longer conduct inspections
- Increased backlog of inspections
- Have contracted out inspections to third-party auditors
- Unable to meet routine regulatory inspection requirements
- Other, please specify:

7. *Specific to your food safety program’s *capacity to investigate and respond to foodborne illness outbreaks*, please indicate the degree to which the following have been impacted over the past two years.

| | >50% decrease | 25-49% decrease | 1-24% decrease | No change | 1-24% increase | 25-49% increase | >50% increase |
|---|---------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Program funding | | | | | | | |
| Staff size | | | | | | | |
| Training for staff | | | | | | | |
| Qualifications and competency of staff | | | | | | | |
| Other food safety workload expectations | | | | | | | |
| Other workload expectations | | | | | | | |

8. Please describe any anecdotal examples in your community of negative health impacts or consequences resulting from budget cuts.

9. If you would like to elaborate on any answer you gave previously in this assessment, please reference the question and add your comment here.

10. If you are interested in providing more detailed information regarding your jurisdiction and budget cut impacts, please provide your name and e-mail address below.

11. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results from this assessment, please provide your name and e-mail address.

Assessment Results Overview

Provided below is an overview of results intended to highlight some main points, information, and trends obtained through the assessment.

Assessment Participant Characteristics

- 75% of assessment participants indicated working at a local government agency and 25% indicated working at a state government agency.
- Feedback was received from 78% of U.S. states, along with feedback from two U.S. territories.
- 66% of assessment participants indicated a job title that can be readily classified as management level.

Administrative Capacity Impacts

- In terms of staff size, staff salaries, and grant funding, about 50% of assessment participants indicated no change over the past two years.
- Assessment participants indicated the following decreases:
 - 45% indicated a decrease in staff size
 - 5% indicated a decrease of over half
 - 12% indicated a decrease between 25 and 49%
 - 53% indicated a decrease in training budgets
 - 32% indicated a decrease between 1 and 24%
 - 58% indicated a decrease in overall budgets
 - 49% indicated a decrease between 1 and 24%
 - 59% indicated a decrease in travel budgets
 - 15% indicated a decrease of over half
- Assessment participants indicated the following increases:
 - 19% indicated some percentage of staff salary increases
 - 14% indicated a 1–24% increase in overall budget
- Comparing local and state agency results:
 - For the most part, the percentages for administrative capacity impacts were similar among local and state agencies.
 - Areas where percentages differed by 10% or more were:
 - Staff salaries: 10% of state agencies indicated an increase between 1 and 24%, compared to 21% of local agencies.
 - Training budgets: 5% of state agencies indicated a decrease between 25 and 49%, compared to 17% of local agencies.

Programmatic Capacity Impacts

- 48% or more of assessment participants indicated no change for all of the programmatic capacities listed with the highest capacities not affect being:
 - Ability to conduct environmental assessments/investigations in response to outbreaks (68%)
 - Ability to respond to food recalls (68%)
 - Ability to respond/investigate consumer foodborne illness complaints (78%)
- 40% indicated some level of decreased ability to support government mandated services

- Furthermore, 33% indicated a decrease in services offered to retail food facilities, 32% indicated a decrease in services offered to other government programs and departments, and 37% indicated a decrease in services offered to the general public.
- Comparing local and state agency results:
 - For the most part, the percentages for programmatic capacity impacts were similar among local and state agencies.
 - Areas where percentages differed by 10% or more were:
 - Ability to support government mandated services: 30% of local agencies indicated a decrease between 1 and 24%, compared to 44% of state agencies.
 - Inspection fees: 62% of local agencies indicated no change, compared to 49% of state agencies.
 - Ability to conduct environmental assessments/investigations in response to outbreaks: 15% of state agencies indicated an increase between 1 and 24%, compared to 5% of local agencies.
 - Ability to respond/investigate consumer foodborne illness complaints: 17% of state agencies indicated an increase between 1 and 24%, compared to 4% of local agencies.

Trends in Program Effects

- Local agencies indicated a decrease in the frequency of inspections, staff sizes, and training/outreach provided to retail food facilities and the general public.
- Local agencies indicated an increase in inspection fees, in-house training of staff, and workloads.
- State agencies indicated a decrease in the frequency of inspections and staff size.

Regulatory Food Safety Program Inspection Impacts

- 25% indicated that they were conducting more inspections while 31% indicated that they were conducting fewer inspections.
- 20% claim they are unable to meet routine regulatory inspection requirements.
- Comparing local and state agency results:
 - For the most part, the percentages for regulatory food safety program inspection impacts were similar among local and state agencies.
 - Areas where percentages differed by 10% or more were:
 - No change to the number of inspections required: 40% of local agencies indicated no change, compared to 22% of state agencies.
 - Fewer inspections conducted: 26% of local agencies indicated conducting fewer inspections, compared to 44% of state agencies.
 - Increased backlog of inspections: 19% of local agencies indicated an increased backlog of inspections, compared to 32% of state agencies.
 - Unable to meet routine regulatory inspection requirements: 16% of local agencies indicated being unable to meet routine regulatory inspection requirements, compared to 32% of state agencies.

Regulatory Food Safety Program Capacity to Investigate and Respond to Foodborne Illness Outbreaks

- In terms of program funding, staff size, qualifications and competency of staff, and other food safety workload expectations, over 50% of assessment participants indicated no change over the past two years.
- 41% indicated an increase in workloads from programs besides food safety.
- 22% indicated an increase in staff qualifications and competency.
- 37% indicated a decrease in staff size.
- 35% indicated a decrease in training for staff.
- 27% indicated a decrease in program funding.
- Comparing local and state agency results:
 - For the most part, the percentages for impacts to regulatory food safety program capacities to investigate and respond to foodborne illness outbreaks were similar among local and state agencies.
 - Areas where percentages differed by 10% or more were:
 - Program funding: 4% of local agencies indicated a decrease between 25 and 49%, compared to 17% of state agencies. Conversely, 3% of local agencies indicated an increase between 1 and 24%, compared to 15% of state agencies.
 - Training for staff: 26% of local agencies indicated a decrease between 1 and 24%, compared to 7% of state agencies. Furthermore, 9% of local agencies indicated an increase between 1 and 24%, compared to 22% of state agencies.
 - Increased backlog of inspections: 19% of local agencies indicated an increased backlog of inspections, compared to 32% of state agencies.

Anecdotal Impact Trends

- Staff morale is low due to increased workloads and decreased salaries.
- There is less focus on educating food workers when conducting inspections. There is also less time spent providing public education and outreach.
- Most haven't experienced any major negative public health impacts due to decreased food safety program capacity, but feel that the potential for increased foodborne illness outbreaks is very likely.
- There is a sense of agencies turning inward to survive, such as trying to stay afloat by focusing on mandated work and trying to compensate for decreased training budgets by focusing on providing in-house training.