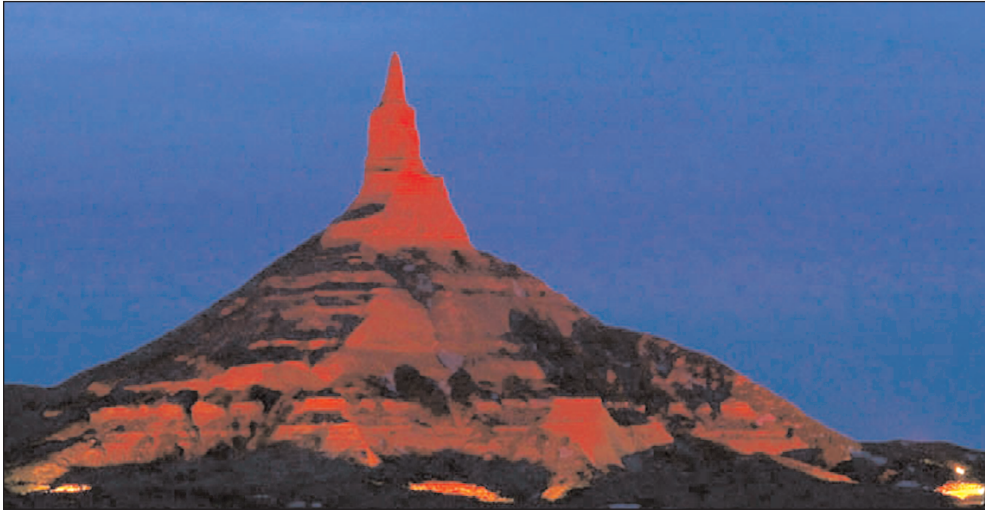


# Chimney Rock goes RED for women



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**Y**ou may have noticed more women wearing red in February, or sporting the little red dress pins on their lapel to call attention to the issue of heart disease among women – America’s number one killer of the female population. But if you didn’t notice the red dresses, you’ll certainly have noticed one of Nebraska’s grandest ladies decked out in red for the month of February.

Chimney Rock Went Red for

Women in February, too. Jessica Davies, wellness and volunteer coordinator with the Panhandle Public Health District, said it was no small feat to get Chimney Rock adorned for heart month. “We worked collaboratively with the City of Bayard on the lighting logistics,” Davies said. “The City was essential in making the lighting possible and we appreciate all of the work they did to make the project a go.”

Nebraskans. “Most people are aware of the risk factors and warning signs of the disease,” Davies said. “But many associate the disease with men. Women have different symptoms, but are just as often stricken with heart problems. They may associate the pains and fatigue with their usual hectic lifestyle and not see a doctor in time. Two-thirds of women who have heart attacks never recover.”

The most common symptom for

heart disease in both women and men is chest pain or discomfort. However, women are more likely to experience other symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting and back or jaw pain. The AHA offers three simple suggestions for women to take control of their own heart health:

To increase physical activity, don’t think of it as exercise. Use the stairs instead of the elevator. Don’t watch from the sidelines, play with your kids. Make appointments for activity in your schedule.

Know your numbers. Total cholesterol should be less than 200; LDL (bad) cholesterol, less than 160 and HDL (good) cholesterol, less than 50. Blood pressure should be less than 120/80; fasting glucose, less than 100 and BMI, less than 25.

Eat smart, too. A balanced diet is low in fat and calories. Eat with others to guard against mindless overeating and only keep healthy snacks around the home and office.

Partners for this project include: Panhandle Public Health District, the City of Bayard, PATCH Health Coalition, and the American Heart Association.

## Panhandle restaurant and bar smoke free

**T**hey go together like cheese and crackers, nuts and bolts – a bar and a smoke-filled room. Or do they?

Nebraska senators have proposed a statewide ban on smoking in all public places and workplaces, but two Bridgeport businesses have beat the lawmakers to the punch and one of them is a restaurant, bar and lounge.

Justin Bilby said he purchased The Rock ‘N Horse Lounge at 909 Main Street in June of 2007 when the business was already smoke-free for about a year. “It was an attraction to me,” Bilby said. “I’m not a smoker and I think this gives me an advantage.”

Bilby said he still gets the occasional complaint from a smoker, but he does offer an outdoor beer garden out back for those who cannot wait until they leave the bar to light up. “The atmosphere is fun,” Bilby said. “We get a fair amount of smokers, but they just go outside.”

He said he can support the statewide ban on smoking in all workplaces as both a business owner and as a customer. Bilby doesn’t want to be exposed to secondhand smoke when he goes to

work or out to enjoy an evening either.

And, when the bar owner wants to be assured of a smoke free environment with a couple of tasty tacos and a side of refries and rice, he can quickly step over to the all smoke-free Mi Puerto Mexican restaurant just a block away.

Mi Puerto owner Luis Mier said he made the decision to go entirely smoke-free in his family-owned, family-run business for just that one reason – his family. Mier said he didn’t want his wife,

his mother-in-law and himself exposed to secondhand smoke on a daily basis at work because he cares about their health.

“Smoking is bad for the employees and bad for the customers,” Mier said. “I didn’t want it in my business.”

Mier said he hears a few complaints, too, but has no plans to offer a smoking area. Like the Rock ‘N Horse clientele, Mi Puerto patrons prefer their food grilled, friend or baked, but not smoked. Mier said in the two to three months he did allow smoking, the smoke drifted out of the smoking area and ruined the meal for the majority of patrons nearby.



## PPHD.org offers personal health assessment

**I**’ve never received a failing grade in my life. Until today.

Today I completed my personal health assessment – a tool meant to gauge my personal health and help contribute some obviously well-disguised data on overall wellness to the Nebraska public health departments.

I shouldn’t have been surprised by the 77. An overall score of 80 or above indicates your lifestyle is on the right track. I had my doubts before I began, but I have been trying to live healthier the past several years so I bit the bullet and dove in.

The assessment was easy once I had my numbers in hand. I knew

my height – it hasn’t changed in years. I knew my weight – I’m on the scale daily lately, much to the poor scale’s chagrin. I didn’t know my blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels, however. So I called my doctor’s office and they quickly raided my latest report. I was on my way.

When I finished the report in

less than five minutes, I was surprised to see a 12-page (yes, 12-page) personal health assessment report available to print. I didn’t score “ideal” in weight, exercise, nutrition, stress, smoking, cancer, cholesterol or blood pressure. I wasn’t at “high risk” either; unless

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Panhandle  
Public

Health

District

Panhandle  
Public Health District



Public Health

2007

## Message from the Board President Carolyn Jones



**Carolyn Jones**  
PPHD Board  
President

I cannot believe another year has flown by, but it is November once again and time to update you on the progress of public health issues in the area.

I would first like to mention November 19, 2007 as Public Health Thank You Day. This is an opportunity to honor local health department staff and volunteer board members. Our work here is helping Panhandle residents live healthier lives, enjoy the things they do, while contributing to the well-being of their family. This is a perfect illustration of how prevention and public health efforts save lives and money by giving

our citizens of Nebraska the information they need to better protect their health. Prevention saves lives and saves money.

Prevention, promotion and protection are the three core values of public health. Panhandle Public Health District coordinates teams across the region in preparedness in case of an emergency – whether natural or manmade. There are teams of emergency responders including medical reserve corps, citizen corps councils, the civil air patrol, search and rescue teams and everyday businesses with emergency preparedness plans. Emergency planners from the communities and health care facilities have drilled, exercised and created plans for hospital policy. They are better prepared now for any emergency and deserve a special thank you for being there when we need them.

The one-on-one contact with the general public often comes from the public health nurses who work with the general public in finding a medical home with a doctor, dentist or pharmacist. Whether it is a question of access or affordability, the nurses are there to assist the patient and the health care provider in making the connection.

Those same nurses are the ones who watch the horizon for communicable diseases in our area. Each week they survey hospitals and schools for any evidence of contagious illnesses to spot trends from one community to another. What might seem like a small number of cases in the north, the south or the central tier of counties – taken together becomes an obvious sign of a developing problem they can help tackle before it gets out of control.

I want to conclude with a big thank you to the staff – Kim, Sara, Becky, Betsy, Jessica, Melody and Alanna – for making public health work in western Nebraska. Also, my thanks to the members of the PPHD Board. Our board includes a group of committed volunteers from every county in our jurisdiction Together they give countless hours for the needs of the public (you and me) to protect their health, prevent disease and injury and be better prepared for emergency.

*Carolyn Jones*  
PPHD President

## Kids Fitness & Nutrition Days



The kids are having so much fun at PPHD-sponsored fitness and nutrition days, they don't realize they're learning good lifetime habits that may some day save their lives.

PPHD Wellness and Volunteer Coordinator Jessica Davies said more than 625 third-graders participated in three Nebraska Kids Fitness and Nutrition Days in Sidney and Chadron. The days centered on noncompetitive physical activities and hands on, interactive nutrition stations — stressing physical activity and healthy eating habits that can be fun.

Physical activities shared during the day in Sidney

included Tae Kwon Do, Yoga, stretch bands, Frisbee Golf and geocaching. The Nebraska State Patrol's "Boot Camp," had the kids in stitches, Davies said. "Drop to the ground and give me 10 pushups," an NSP officer barks. Ten kids hit the ground, but 10 more might give up in giggles.

Kids at the Chadron event could be seen dancing for their health, hence the day's theme Dance for the Health of it. Activities offered to the youth included various Hawaiian, Folk, and Tinikling dances, tumbling and parachute games.

Some of the healthy eating habits demonstrated for Kids Fitness and Nutrition Day included portion distortion, Energy Balance and Label

Logic. In the Energy Balance booth, students were allowed to choose their own snack – a chocolate bar, a piece of beef jerky or an apple.

The kick? After enjoying the snack, the child was asked to do an activity equal to the number of calories in their snack. The lesson? You can enjoy an occasional Snickers bar, if you're willing to pay the price at Boot Camp later.

Davies said the eight-year-olds are the prime candidates to learn about reading labels for calories, nutritional value and ingredient's lists and making their own health snack: trail mix. Learning young about the correct size for a serving – the size of your hand or a deck of cards, could save them countless calories and pounds around the middle later in life.

And, of course, between activities and snacks there were lessons on washing up. Public health nurses with PPHD and area hospitals shared the rules for good hand washing, plenty of soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds in the sink.

Sponsors for the two Nebraska Kids Fitness and Nutrition Days in Sidney were the Cheyenne County Community Center, Memorial Health Center, the Area Health Education Center, Sonny's Super Foods, and area businesses. In Chadron, PPHD was joined by representatives of Chadron State College in putting on the event there. NKFND was developed and funded, in part, by the Nebraska Beef Council and the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

## Dangers of MRSA detailed

A common bacteria that lives on the skin and in the nasal passages of healthy individuals can mutate into a staph infection resistant to certain antibiotics. Public Health Nurse Betsy Horstman said sometimes complications from a common staph infection can arise if the bacteria becomes resistant or further spread into other areas of the body.

"Many people get a simple staph infection in a wound or abrasion," Horstman said. "Such an infection can be simply treated with home remedies or common antibiotics." But when the strain is Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, commonly known as MRSA, the complications can be more serious because this type

of staph is resistant to certain antibiotics but can still be treated.

Horstman said people may be aware of staph infections acquired in a hospital or other health-care facility where wounds and germs may abound, but the community-acquired MRSA infection is a different breed altogether. The transmission of MRSA infection typically occurs in crowded areas where there's an opportunity for people to come into contact with infected items and then spread the infection to others such as athletic settings. The infection can be transferred skin-to-skin, wound-to-wound or through contaminated personal items like soap, tow-

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### Panhandle Public Health District

Serving the counties in the Nebraska Panhandle of Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Sheridan, and Sioux

Kim Engel, Director  
Jessica Davies, Wellness/Volunteer Coordinator  
Betsy Horstman, RN, Surveillance Public Health Nurse  
Melody Leisy, RN, PRMRS Coordinator Public Health Nurse  
Becky Corman, RN, Emergency Response Coordinator Public Health Nurse  
Sara Sulzbach, Administrative Assistant/Bookkeeper  
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Phone 308-487-3600, Toll Free 866-701-7173, Fax 308-487-3682  
www.pphd.org

Also located at: 208 East 6th Street, Bridgeport, NE 69336, Phone 308-262-2217, Fax 308-262-2218

**The vision of PPHD: A coordinated system of public health services that promotes and enhances the health status of the Panhandle-wide community.**

# Dental Day a continuing success in the Panhandle



Everyone is smiling following the success of another Dental Day program across the region. This is the fourth year UNMC College of Dentistry students have traveled to the Panhandle to offer free dental services to children. 179 children received a total of 1112 procedures totaling a value of approximately \$80,000 or \$447 per child. A variety of services were provided including cleanings, fluoride treatments, sealants, and cavity fillings in Alliance, Chadron, Gordon, and Sidney. In addition to the personal visits for youth to area dental offices, Dental Day professionals were able to consult with UNMC specialists via the telehealth network.

Often, the reason children do not receive dental screenings isn't lack of concern for good oral hygiene, said Kim Engel, director of Panhandle Public Health District. More often, children in rural American do not have insurance for dental care.

Uninsured residents of the Panhandle rank second highest in the state at 18.4%, which is significantly higher than the 11.7% for the entire state. "Good insurance includes good dental coverage," Engel said. Dental care is the most common unmet treatment in children according to a state report on oral health among 3rd graders "Tooth decay can be prevented by a balanced diet, good dental hygiene, regular visits to the dentist, the use

of fluoride, and dental sealants," Engel said.

Dentists who participated in the Dental Day X include Donald Taylor, Jr. DDS, Paul Maxwell, DDS and Gene Giles, DDS of Alliance, Sam Jacoby, DDS, Bridgeport, Tim Jensen DDS, Oshkosh, Bill Printz, DDS, Michael Neal, DDS, and Melanie Kroft, DDS of Sidney, Travis Lambert, DDS and Terry Owens, DDS of Chadron. In addition, Gordon Memorial Hospital and Chadron Community Hospital provided sites for portable dental chairs and Box Butte General Hospital was a site for surgeries. All of these resources were provided without charge to the families.

Many organizations, institutions, companies, and individuals made Dental Day 2007 a reality, including these: UNMC College of Dentistry; Nebraska Health and Human Services System; Box Butte General Hospital; Gordon Memorial Hospital; Chadron Community Hospital and Prairie Pines Lodge; area dentists and dental hygienists; Western Community Health Resources; Health Professions Club members, Cover Jones and Wahlstrom Ford; Pepsi Distributing Company; RSVP; Panhandle Public Health District; and nurses and concerned individuals from across the Panhandle.

## MRSA . . .

—from page two

els, a razor or clothing.

Common hygiene precautions such as frequent hand washing, bandaging open wounds until they are completely healed, avoiding sharing personal items and washing and drying soiled items at high temperatures are the best preventative measures, Horstman said. Good personal hygiene is also imperative – showering often and changing clothes frequently is important in any situation, but even more important in avoiding an infection such as MRSA.

If you think you may have a staph infection, contact your health

care provider as soon as possible. Wounds may appear in the form of a pimple, abscess or spider bite. Signs of infection include redness, swelling, pain, pus or other drainage. More serious signs are fever, shortness of breath, and or chills.

A history of simple staph infections or overuse of antibiotics may also lead to the resistant forms of staph infection. For more information about MRSA, see: [www.dhhs.ne.gov/ars/anti.htm](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/ars/anti.htm) or [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html).

## Message from the Director



**Kim Engel**  
Director

It's the time of the year to count your blessings and, in public health; there are so many good things about living in rural Nebraska I'm not sure where to begin.

I'm especially thankful for the culture of collaboration we have in this community we call the Panhandle. Our jobs at PPHD are made so much easier by the excellent people we work with in the health care facilities, the schools and the community collaborations working alongside us in each of the 10 counties we serve. Our affiliation with the Panhandle Partnership has been the source of both professional resources and personal friendships.

I'm also thankful for the assistance the communities receive for prescription drug assistance. Oftentimes, the elderly or low income have problems keeping up with their prescriptions. PPHD contracts with several hospitals and health care agencies throughout the Panhandle to serve these needs and make sure your prescriptions are both accessible and affordable. In the past year, together we have helped people receive 958 free prescriptions.

Thank goodness especially for good health! Do you know your personal health strengths and weaknesses? Nebraska's local public health districts are working together to offer a personalized health assessment for every man, woman and child in the state who cares about their health and would like ideas on how to improve it.

You may take the assessment online at our website, [www.pphd.org](http://www.pphd.org), print the results and follow the advice on getting your lifestyle on the right track. Your personal information is not available to anyone on an individual basis – only groups of data for counties or gender will be shared with health care planners in an effort to improve over all public health in our community. Please print your assessment and follow up on taking it again in six months to a year; we hope you will see progress.

Here in public health, we don't live (just) to plan but we do plan to live so we collect data and use it to base program decisions on that improve your life and mine. I'm thankful there are individuals who will share their data and help plan for the health of others in programs like Maternal Child Health Care and Cardiovascular Disease Prevention.

This spring and summer, large groups of concerned individuals mobilized for action to plan in partnership (MAPP) for two particular community-driven strategic goals – improving the health of mothers and their children and reducing cardiovascular disease through better fitness, nutrition and reducing exposure to cigarette smoke. Community leaders identified resources to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and, ultimately, the performance of our local public health systems in these two areas. The cardiovascular disease intervention, derived through the MAPP process has been funded and you will see the results in your community yet this fall. Watch for "Just Move It!"

Again, thank you for your involvement in your personal health and the health of those in your community. By sharing the responsibility and the workload involved in good public health measures, we define community and demonstrate compassion. I applaud you and I thank you.

*Kim Engel*  
PPHD Director

## 10 Essential Services of Public Health

- Monitor health status and understand health issues facing the community.
- Protect people from health problems and health hazards.
- Give people information they need to make healthy choices.
- Engage the community to identify and solve health problems.
- Develop public health policies and plans.
- Enforce public health laws and regulations.
- Help people receive health services
- Maintain a competent public health workforce.
- Evaluate and improve programs and interventions.
- Contribute to and apply the evidence base of public health.

# Nursing students hear about public health careers

When little boys and girls dream of becoming a nurse when they grow up, their dreams probably don't include starched white uniforms and caps of the 1950s. They also may not include a clear idea of what public health or community nursing is all about – but one public health nurse is out to change all that.

Melody Leisy, RN, PRMRS Coordinator has been visiting the Community Health class of senior students nursing class at the University of Nebraska Medical Center's College of Nursing in Scottsbluff each semester for two years. Leisy communicates to the nursing students the unique combination of community involvement and medical knowledge used by the public health nurse to serve the individuals and the region.

A public health nurse translates her knowledge of health and social sciences to the general population through targeted interventions, programs and advocacy. One day

Leisy and the other public health nurses with Panhandle Public Health District might be working with preschoolers learning to wash their hands or brush their teeth properly. The next day they're setting up dental exams for hundred of deserving area children and by week's end they may have taught a moulage clinic for volunteer firefighters, spoke to an audience of school and company nurses about the value of a smoke-free environment and educated an audience of Rotarians on the dangers of West Nile Virus.

Leisy said besides sharing her passion of public health nursing with the nursing students and possibly recruiting nurses into her chosen field, she's also there for another recruitment duty. From kid's fitness and nutrition day to passing out flu shots, there are always countless volunteer opportunities for the student nurse.

In the second half of each semester's course on public health, the students work with

staff from Behavioral Health Region I to learn about psychological first aid. According to the American Public Health Association, it is only relatively recently that attention has been focused on the mental health impact of disasters. Efforts will include helping both the patients and the providers in an emergency — individuals under stress will need reminders to take care of their own health and limit potentially harmful behaviors.

Basic psychological first aid includes the ability to:

- identify safe areas and behaviors
- maximize individuals' ability to care for self and family
- teach calming skills and maintenance nutrition, sleep, rest and exercise
- facilitate connectedness to family and other social supports to the extent
- foster hope and optimism while not denying risk

## Health Care Professionals give back

A busy doctor or health care professional might be the last person you'd expect to see out volunteering. But doctors and nurses want to give back to their community too and they possess special expertise not available in the rest of the workforce – healing hands to help save lives in the event of a disaster.

The Medical Reserve Corps is a regional group of medical professionals — physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, and veterinarians who will assist in mass immunization/prophylaxis clinics, create additional "surge" capacity when an emergency need arises and help with emergency preparedness planning. Other community members, such as interpreters, chaplains, office workers and legal advisors can fill other vital support positions.

PPHD also works with a network of emergency response chaplains and other volunteers in cooperation with the regional Panhandle Citizen Corps Network and

the United Way volunteer management pool.

Melody Leisy is the coordinator for the Panhandle Region Medical Response System, comprised of 11 counties, nine hospitals and two public health districts. They are one of six medical response systems across the state. The Panhandle group along with three other rural medical response systems in Nebraska, recently received an \$868,000 federal grant to enhance emergency response preparedness in the panhandle

"Rural communities across the state of Nebraska are faced with the challenge of providing services to large geographic areas. These areas may not be as populated as urban areas, but the vulnerabilities are still very real and can severely tax the resources in place," said Leisy. "This grant will help us prepare more effectively for such disasters as ice storms, blizzards, chemical spills, pandemic flu or any manmade, natural or biological disaster that may

affect the health and well being of our population."

"Most of the Panhandle is designated as a health professional shortage area," Leisy continued. "Because of that, our initial recruitment efforts for the MRC will target those health professionals not already employed by or working with acute care facilities – such as nurses in the school, community and parish settings. Other disciplines will be targeted later."

MRCs are a part of a larger group of citizen volunteers in the Panhandle and across the U.S., known as Citizen Corps. Along with the Peace Corps and another national community service group, the three are known as the President's USA Freedom Corps.

For more information about the Medical Reserve Corps, visit [www.medicalreservecorps.gov](http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov) or contact Leisy at the PPHD's Bridgeport office, 202 East 6th Street or 308-262-2217.

## New faces at PPHD



Becky Corman RN

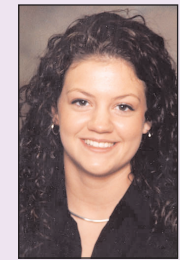
Becky Corman, RN is the newest face with Panhandle Public Health District. She joins Melody Leisy, RN, at the new Bridgeport office location at 208 East 6th Street. The office phone number remains the same at 308-262-2217.

Corman is the Emergency Response Coordinator for PPHD, replacing Leisy who will supervise Corman and serve as coordinator for the Panhandle Region Medical Response System, known as PRMRS. Corman will also serve as a public health nurse in the southern counties of the Panhandle.

She graduated from the University of Nebraska Medical Center at Omaha in 2004 with a BSN in nursing, having completed her

core requirements at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

She and her husband Justin have one daughter, Alexis, age eight. She is a lifetime resident of Bridgeport.



Alanna Wacker Assistant

Another addition to the PPHD staff in Hemingford is high school senior Alanna Wacker, 18-year-old daughter of Brian and Susan Wacker. Alanna is very active in school as student council president, a member of FCCLA, the flag team, National Honor Society and student health council. She enjoys playing volleyball and keeps stats for the football and wrestling teams, as well.

Alanna is planning a career in nursing, but has not chosen a school yet for next fall.

## Second Hand Smoke: too much, too often, every time



Jessica Davies Wellness/Volunteer Coordinator

Second hand smoke is the combination of smoke from the burning end of the cigarette and the smoke breathed out by smokers. When you breathe secondhand smoke, it is like you are smoking. Whether you are young or old, healthy or sick, secondhand smoke is dangerous.

What we now know:

No amount of secondhand smoke is safe. Make your environment smoke-free. Make your home and car smoke-free. Visit smoke-free restaurants and public places. Ask people not to smoke around you and your children.

Secondhand smoke causes death and sickness in children. Breathing secondhand smoke is a known cause of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Children

are also more likely to have lung problems, ear infections, and severe asthma.

Secondhand smoke causes heart disease and lung cancer in adults. Breathing secondhand smoke for even a short time can have immediate bad effects. Over time, secondhand smoke can cause heart disease and lung cancer.

There is no such thing as a "No Smoking" section. No amount of secondhand smoke is safe. Here are some unexpected ways you may breathe secondhand smoke every day. Here are some unexpected ways to may breathe secondhand smoke every day:

- Sitting in the "no smoking" section even if it doesn't smell smoky
- Riding in a car while someone else is smoking, even if a window is open
- Being in a house where people are smoking, even if you're in another room
- Working in any restaurant, warehouse, or building that allows smoking inside, even if there is a filter or ventilation system.

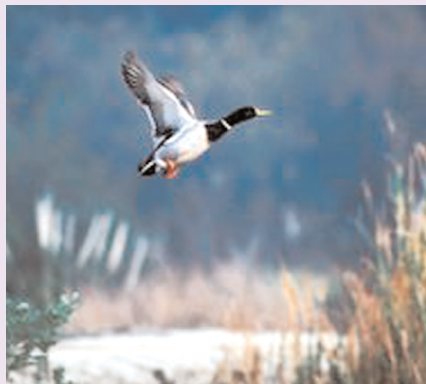
## Hunters must take precautions against bird flu

The average consumer doesn't have a lot of interaction with birds, but for avid hunters the time is right for bagging a goose, duck or pheasant – and sportsman need to take precautions to continue to enjoy the sport.

Avian flu, commonly known as bird flu, occurs naturally in wild birds.

"Humans do not typically become infected with the disease," Becky Corman said. "However as of October 25, 2007 there were 332 human cases of H5N1 (bird flu) with 204 deaths in Southeast Asia. Some people believe the avian flu will be the next pandemic – a virus with no known vaccine or cure that kills millions."

Corman is the Emergency Response Coordinator with Panhandle Public Health District. She



said birds are living reservoirs for a wide variety of viruses and any one of those viruses could be categorized as a "bird flu." However, it is the H5N1 virus that is a serious threat to humans, especially hunters handling the still-warm dead bird.

While no cases of the H5N1 bird flu have been detected in North America, the possibility exists for infected birds to come into contact with birds that migrate into western Nebraska. According to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, scientists have monitored wild flocks in Alaska and other areas and will continue to do so. Should the disease be discovered on this continent, measures will likely be taken to eradicate infected birds in order to prevent

the spread of the disease, they said.

Corman advises hunters to be alert for sick birds and to be cautious when handling game animals. "Hunters should never handle sick game birds," Corman said. "If you spy a sick or dead bird, contact the Game and Parks immediately."

When handling the game you have killed, Corman suggests the hunter wear rubber or disposable latex gloves and wash their hands and equipment thoroughly with soap and water after cleaning the birds. "Do not smoke, eat or drink while handling animals," she continued. "And be sure to thoroughly cook all game animals. Well done or 160 degree Fahrenheit is the proper temperature to avoid viruses."

"There is little chance of encountering infected birds or becoming infected with the bird flu," Corman concluded. However, she suggests precautions are always the wiser course and will nearly eliminate any need for concern.

## Civil Air Patrol Readies for Emergency

Readiness is a key factor for the health care providers in case of an emergency. Hospital, city and EMT personnel drill on a regular basis for possible disasters in their community and region. But without the proper equipment and supplies at the ready, the health care providers would be at a major loss in any emergency.

In the summer of 2007, area health care managers and Civil Air Patrol volunteers teamed up to provide an exercise testing the incident command structure and the transport throughout the region for necessary stockpiles of emergency supplies. An early morning phone call from Chadron Community Hospital CEO Harold Krueger to Panhandle Public Health District Director Kim Engel started the exercise right, according to the National Incident Management Systems.

The chain of command included Nan Thornton with Region 23 Emergency Management, who activated the Civil Air Patrol, an auxiliary of the United States Air Force to assist in a volunteer capacity for emergencies and other special

needs such as search and rescue. Founded in December 1941, one week before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, 15,000 CAP pilots flew more than a half million hours, sinking two enemy subs and rescuing hundreds of crash survivors during World War II.

The Civil Air Patrol now includes 1,500 units and 57,000 members nationwide. Locally the

***"Readiness is a key factor for the health care providers in case of an emergency."***

Pine Ridge Composite Squadron, stationed at the Chadron Airport, has 18 members, including four pilots volunteering in emergency services, search and rescue and providing disaster-relief support by transporting time-sensitive medical materials between communities.

Most often, Emergency Response Coordinator Melody Leisy said, local emergency managers use trucks to move regional stockpiles across the region. Each hospital has developed their own stockpile, at some expense, to be prepared for emergency. Working

together, if an emergency were confined to any one area of the Panhandle, the supplies could be quickly moved to the affected area by ground transportation.

However, plan B is for the Civil Air Patrol pilots to transport the emergency supplies. Once activated, two planes left Chadron, traveling to Scottsbluff to pick up the stockpiled materials. The first plane took a southern route to Scottsbluff, Kimball, Sidney and Garden County. The second plane traveled north from Scottsbluff to Alliance, Gordon and Chadron.

Through the emergency contact system, PPHD contacted emergency responders in each community to meet the planes. Hospitals involved include Memorial Health Center in Sidney, Garden County Health Services and the Chadron Community Hospital.

The exercise was a success, Leisy said, proving the value and reliability of the incident management system and the local coordinators. The exercises are repeated annually or more often to keep each leg of the program in line and ready for take off.

## Congratulations Dr. Koch

PPHD offers a big salute to Dr. H. Frederick Koch, recently retired from our board and from private practice in pediatrics in Alliance.

Dr. Koch served two years in public health with Panhandle Public Health District from October 2005-2007. As a pediatrician in Alliance, Dr. Koch's wide experience and involvement with local patients proved invaluable to the health district on a variety of occasions.

Dr. Koch retired from private practice in Alliance this past summer, but will continue to serve as medical director for Human Services, Inc., a substance abuse treatment facility in Alliance. He became interested in substance abuse work 25 years ago, working in Louisiana and is certified with the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

As a pediatrician in Alliance for 15 years, Dr. Koch was well-respected and loved by his patients. He received his medical degree from the University of Nebraska



Dr. Koch

Medical Center in Omaha and studied pediatrics at the University of Kansas in Kansas City, Kan. He also received special training at St. Jude's Hospital in Memphis, Tenn. Dr. Koch was also a member of the U.S. Air Force 17 years, working with children's blood diseases and malignancies, the topic he trained for at St. Jude's.

## PH nurses keep watchful eye on communicable diseases



Betsy Horstman  
RN

The basic function of the Disease Investigation and surveillance program is to reduce the risk or prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

The Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) assists the communicable disease division of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services by interviewing, reporting, educating, and assisting in finding treatment for those possibly exposed to an infectious disease.

Betsy Horstman, RN, Surveillance Public Health Nurse, notes there are over 50 different reportable diseases including West Nile Virus, Rabies, Pertussis (whooping cough) and those caused by food-borne bacteria like E-coli and Salmonella. In total, Horstman followed up on nearly 80 cases of reportable diseases this year.

There are also programs in place to help track and monitor illnesses

in the community. The school surveillance program includes monitoring what illnesses may be arising in the Panhandle and to look for any common links among the schools. Each Wednesday, the schools will email, fax, or call with a report of how many kids are absent due to illness. Reports for absences due to illness are all noted, but most especially those with the influenza (flu) a respiratory illness, a gastrointestinal illness, rash, fever, asthma, strep throat or any unusual illness.

The local health department will report these numbers to the state through a secure website. The reports are monitored by the state and local health department to track spikes in absences, which could indicate an outbreak. With weekly stats for each of the schools, patterns become evident and trends of large numbers of students with flu-like symptoms are apparent to those tracking disease across the Panhandle and state.

PPHD also surveys hospitals for influenza-like illnesses (ILI) among inpatients. All seven hospi-

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**PPHD provides school action kits**

When pandemic flu strikes, the small town institutions most likely to be affected will be—hospitals, schools, essential services and large employers. While hospitals must remain open to serve those in need, the thought of a school closing is a first consideration administrators must make.

Panhandle Public Health District provides school action kits to each of the area schools to aid in pandemic flu planning. The kits include sample letters the school can use to discuss awareness of the problem, possible and actual closure of the school and the “all clear” to return to school.

PPHD Emergency Response Coordinator Melody Leisy said the action kits were devised by Two Rivers Public Health Department and then shared with others across the State. The letters primarily include educational information for the parents of students – creating a preparedness kit for when pandemic strikes and when the decision will be made to close the school.

For most outbreaks, 15% and 30% of students absent are the action points to close a school. But, for instances of pandemic flu (a disease marked by high levels of communicability, difficulty of treatment and no immunization prior to the illness striking home), if even one percent of the students are ill, the health district will advise closing the school immediately. Again, the final decision rests with the school superintendent, Leisy said.

# Panhandle has taken a regional approach to many of its preparedness efforts

The Panhandle Medical Response System is made up of Gordon Memorial Hospital, Chadron Community Hospital, Box Butte General Hospital, Garden County Health Services, Morrill County Community Hospital, Memorial Health Center, Perkins County Health Services, Kimball Health Services, Regional West Medical Center, Region 1 Behavioral Health, Panhandle Community Services Health Clinic, EMS, Emergency Managers from the Panhandle, Scottsbluff Public Health Department and Panhandle Public Health District.

Our focus is to develop and exercise a regional medical response system. Included in that is the Panhandle Citizen Corp Council and the Panhandle Medical Reserve Corp. Below are some specific accomplishments.

## I.C.E. Your Cell Phone In Case of Emergency

**P**roblem: Your cell phone can be an indispensable lifeline at times of crisis, reuniting loved ones separated by unforeseen events at the touch of a button. But for members of the emergency services making life-and-death decisions, the cell phone poses a challenge: Which of the numbers stored in your electronic address book should they call to reach your next of kin?

**Solution:** Put the acronym ICE for “in case of emergency” before the names of the people you want to designate as next of kin in your cell address book, creating entries such as “ICE – Dad” or “ICE – Allison.”

The Panhandle Citizen Corps Network offers the following tips:

• Make sure the person whose name and number you are giving has agreed to be your ICE partner

• Make sure your ICE partners have a list of people they should contact on your behalf – including your place of work.

• Make sure your ICE partners' numbers are easy to contact at any time.

• Make sure your ICE partners know about any medical conditions that could affect your emergency treatment – for example allergies or current medications.

• Make sure if you are under 18 that your ICE partner is your parent or guardian, authorized to make decisions on your behalf.

This information is provided as a service of the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission and Panhandle Citizen Corps Network. For additional information on how to prepare yourself and your community, contact Jessica Davies at (866) 701-7173 or the commission at (800)291-8911.



## Ponderosa Search & Rescue on the trail

**I**t's all a big game for Cody, Pepsi and Bam Bam. Clifford, Tipper, Trigger and Pepper do it for the doggy treats. But when their skills come into question in real life, the aforementioned dogs and horses “game time” may be the difference between life and death.

For four years, these animals, their counterparts across the Panhandle and their humans have been training to track lost or missing persons in rugged terrain where a four-wheeler might be challenged. As part of the Ponderosa Search & Rescue Team, the horses are certified to air scent both off lead and on lead. The dogs are also certified to find a human by following their scent – fallen away dead skin cells and body odor – in the air, a bit different than the bloodhounds we've all seen in the movies.

Air scenting doesn't differentiate between different persons, like a bloodhound given a piece of the missing person's clothing to begin the search. The dog's given a reward if he finds another searcher along the path, but he keeps going until the “real” missing person is

found. “PSAR's been put on alert three times,” Genice Walters of Marsland said. “But each time they found the person before we went out.”

Still, the group trains on a regular basis, both as a group at team meetings and individually with their own horses and dogs.

There are about 21-25 adults on the SAR team, from across the Panhandle. All are ready, at a moment's notice, to go out into the field to find a lost child or a hurt hiker.

“We put the Ponderosa Search & Rescue Team into the same category



Tom Walters, president of the Ponderosa Search & Rescue Team, said his horse knows when it's time to search because he uses a special bridle for only that purpose.

as the Jaws of Life,” Mark Klemke with the Hemingford Fire Department said. “We may not need them often, but when we do, they're a lifesaver.”

The training began with Terry Nowacki of Minnesota, a lifelong horse trainer who first taught the skills to his horse when he became tired of running behind his dog on a search.

“The air scenting horse works better than words can describe,” Nowacki said. “The great part about it is the horses really enjoy it and they can learn it easily.”

“We've learned to know our animals,” Gretchen Lotspeich of Craw-

## Hospitals Collaborate to develop emergency policy templates



Melody Leisy

**T**he old adage two heads are better than one, led hospital policy makers to believe eight hospital emergency planners would be better than one when it came to developing internal and external disaster policies. A regional group of emergency planners known as the Panhandle Rural Medical Response System and coordinated by PPHD's Melody Leisy, worked together to develop a list of essential policies required by the state.

Internal policies cover staff education and plans to be sure there are adequate people to man all the stations in the event of an emergency. A recent poll at Regional West Medical Center in January of 2007 indicated most respondents would be limited in their work schedule by family situations — such as caring for a dependent child, a pet or adult family member.

Leisy said the group took the best of each organization's existing disaster policies and working with a consultant, developed one large plan for each to use as a template. Following the development of the policy templates, PRMRS shared their compilation with member hospitals and other medical response systems statewide.

Laura Meyers of the Kearney area Tri-City Medical Response System works with emergency planners in hospitals in a 23-county area. She said PRMRS templates were placed in notebooks with National Incident Management System information and shared with each of the 18 hospital in the TRIMRS communities.

“The hospitals used the PRMRS and NIMS info to create new policies or to improve their existing policies,” Meyers said. TRIMRS includes three tertiary care centers with 130 or more beds and the other hospitals in their system have any-

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## Q&I regs localized

**I**t sounds like a scene from a TV movie of the week, but the possibility of an outbreak of a contagious disease striking fear into the hearts of Panhandle residents is a real possibility. To prevent the spread of a pandemic disease, intentional attack or a natural disaster, local officials would be required to enforce laws related to quarantine and isolation.

Quarantine restricts the movement of individuals who have possibly been exposed to a disease. Isolation is required for individuals known to have the disease.

Early this past spring, each of the 10 counties in the Panhandle Public Health District adopted a set of regulations for the isolation and quarantine of people exposed to communicable disease. Previously the laws were state ordinances, but still the local officials were charged with enforcing the rules. The state Department of Health and Human Services legal department drafted a template ordinance for local boards to adopt.

The quarantine and isolation should last no longer than necessary, the regulations insist, and those under quarantine should not be mixing with those who are completely isolated. A lab test can rule out a communicable disease and allow the director to lift the directive quarantining individuals or groups to their home, workplace or a health care facility.

### 2006-07 Timeline

October 2006	November 2006	December 2006	January 2007	February 2007	March 2007	April 2007	May 2007	June 2007	July 2007	August 2007	September 2007	October 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPower3 campaign Kick-off</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pandemic Flu Workshop held in Sidney</li> <li>• Wide Open Spaces 4 state televido emergency exercise.</li> <li>• Regional Pandemic Flu Exercise with DDHS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration and facilitation with WCHR Strategic Planning</li> <li>• PPHD staff strategic planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPHD Board adopted updated Quarentine and Isolation Regulations.</li> <li>• Pandemic Flu Table top exercise held for Dawes &amp; Sioux County</li> <li>• National Radon Action Month-Area Science teachers promote take-home test kits to students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chimney Rock goes Red to increase awareness of Heart Disease in women</li> <li>• Awarded Podcasting Across NE grant-received from Lt. Gov. Sheehy</li> <li>• Alliance Community Pandemic Flue Exercise</li> <li>• Pandemic Flu Planning School Kits Distributed to superintendents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups conducted in all counties for Maternal Child Health Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships</li> <li>• UNMC College of Nursing Emergency Preparedness Training for mass dispensing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sidney's Second annual Kids Fitness and Nutrition Day</li> <li>• Panhandle Drug Task Force Regional Conference</li> <li>• Panhandle Regional Health Summit for Children, Youth, Women &amp; Families</li> <li>• Great Lakes Airlines, Chadron Community Emergency Preparedness Exercise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top Group Facilitation and Partifatory Strategic Planning training -- 42 people attending</li> <li>• Household Preparedness presentation at Bio-preparedness Symposium</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4th Ann. Panhandle Dental Day held in Sidney, Alliance, Chadron, &amp; Gordon</li> <li>• Civil Air Patrol Exercise</li> <li>• First Podcast posted on PPHD website.</li> <li>• MPower3 campaign ends-Grand Prizes awarded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Planning for Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease using evidence based practices</li> <li>• All accounting functions switched to in-house</li> <li>• New server installed in Hemingford office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panhandle Citizen Corp Network established</li> <li>• Strategic Planning completed for Training Academy</li> <li>• Moved to new office location in Bridgeport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Medical Reserve Corp established.</li> <li>• PPHD and Panhandle Partnership featured on Kansas U. Community Tool Box website.</li> <li>• 3rd Kids Fitness and Nutrition Day in Sidney.</li> <li>• Board member, Kim Woods, presents a National Local Boards of Health Conference on PRMRS.</li> <li>• Becky Corman, RN hired.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2nd Annual Kids Fitness and Nutrition Day in Chadron.</li> <li>• Community Hero in Training Campaign launched as an environmental strategy to reduce underage drinking</li> <li>• 4th year Influenza like illness surveillance in hospitals begins</li> </ul>

## Unintentional and intentional Injuries are a leading cause of death

**P**anhandle - A common misconception shared by many people is that unintentional injuries happen as a result of "accidents," when in fact, most injuries are predictable and preventable.

"Injuries are a major public health problem in Nebraska resulting in significant numbers of deaths, hospitalizations, and emergency department visits," said Kim Engel, Health Director of the Panhandle Public Health District. "From 1999 to 2003, injuries overall, including unintentional and intentional injuries, were the fifth leading cause of death in the PPHD jurisdiction."

Deaths due to injury made up 6.1% of total deaths in PPHD counties, which is comparable to the state average.

Motor vehicle crashes were the leading cause of injury death. PPHD rate is almost double the state rate for motor vehicle crashes resulting in death.

Teens and young adults (age 15 to 24) had the highest motor vehicle crash death and hospital dis-

charge rates.

Suicide was the second leading cause of injury death in the PPHD jurisdiction. Persons in the 25-44 year age group were more likely to die from suicide than those in other age groups.

Males were nearly six times more likely to die from suicide than females.

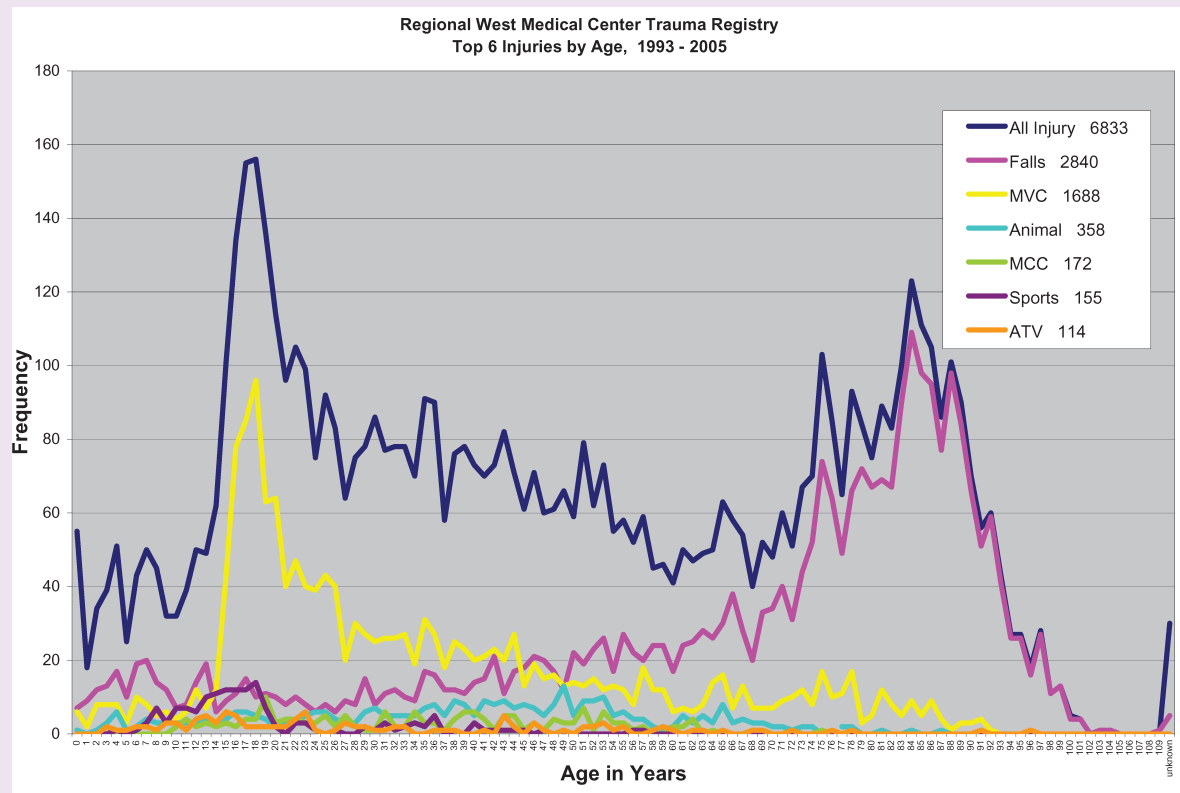
Falls were the leading cause of injury hospital discharge for all ages combined. They were the third leading cause of unintentional injury death.

Regional Trauma network data from 2003-2006 reveals that the leading causes of trauma are:

### Leading causes of trauma

Number of people treated in emergency rooms throughout the Panhandle:

Falls . . . . .	1042
Motor vehicle crashes . . . . .	589
Animal . . . . .	143
Motorcycle . . . . .	73
Sports related . . . . .	67
ATV . . . . .	64
Assault . . . . .	52
Farm/heavy equipment . . . . .	40
Gun Shot wound . . . . .	28



## Local business customizes preparedness plan

**W**hen a business provides a critical service to the community it is even more important they have an emergency preparedness plan for how that service will continue in case of a disaster. Such was the case with Northwest Rural Public Power District in the northern Panhandle of Nebraska.

Northwest Rural provides electricity, satellite television and Internet access to hundreds in northwest Nebraska, including the rural areas surrounding Hay Springs, Gordon, Rushville, Chadron and Crawford. While most folks could live without a satellite television or Internet connection for several days (under duress), fewer NWRPPD customers could survive without electricity.

The power supplier has critical customer lists for folks on respirators, with oxygen or other medical needs following a release from the hospital. Melody Leisy, coordinator for the Panhandle Region Medical Response System, known as PRMRS, is an employee of the Panhandle Public Health District. She worked with Les Tlustos, cus-

tommer service director for Northwest Rural to develop a personalized emergency response plan for the electric company in case of a disaster.

The plan includes critical functions for the customers and also identification of other jobs of a critical nature. Who can handle those critical functions in emergency and backup plans for other employees to step in if the first provider is not available are also parts of a business's emergency plan.

NWRPPD is in the process of developing policies and procedures in emergency situations. From the large issues like supplying critical power to the smallest detail like accepting payments from those who cannot leave their home due to quarantine and isolation, NWRPPD is prepared. And preparedness is the name of the game in continuing a business with fewer interruptions in the case of a disaster.

## Mercury Bucket offers disposal options

**P**anhandle Public Health District continues to offer a project to reduce health-threatening exposures to broken mercury-containing thermometers and other mercury-containing devices. Through a grant from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Indoor Air Quality Program, Panhandle Public Health District offers a bucket to collect mercury-containing devices.

Mercury is a silvery, mobile, liquid that is used in thermometers and other consumer products such as fluorescent tube light bulbs, blood pressure measuring instruments, and button batteries. It is a hazardous chemical that can cause

harmful health effects when inhaled.

Short-term exposure to high concentrations may cause headaches, cough, chest pains, chest tightness, and difficulty in breathing. In addition, exposure may cause soreness of the mouth, abdominal pain, nausea, and diarrhea.

Long term exposure causes effects that develop gradually, including: fine shaking of the hands, eyelids, lips, tongue, or jaw. Other effects include allergic skin rash, headache, sores in the mouth, sore and swollen gums, loose teeth, insomnia, excess salivation, personality change, irritability, indecision, loss of memo-

ry, and intellectual deterioration.

According to Jessica Davies, Wellness Coordinator for Panhandle Public Health District, there are nine drop-off locations throughout the Panhandle:

"This project allows for safe disposal of mercury containing devices for Panhandle residents and a great way to get these devices out of your home," Davies said. If you have mercury that needs to be disposed of, please recycle it at one of the following Panhandle locations:

For more information on drop off places in the Panhandle, call PPHD at (308) 487-3600 or visit [www.pphd.org](http://www.pphd.org)

## Disease Surveillance . . .

—from page five

tals in the Panhandle's jurisdiction participate in the weekly survey, paying special attention to the ages of patients admitted. Horstman said the information compiled includes the name of the hospital, age range, occupancy rate and number of patients requiring a ventilator – a sign the respiratory illness is very serious.

Another surveillance question regards the number of personnel home with the flu or personnel shortage problems. In the event of a flu outbreak, especially a pandemic flu, the hospitals and the PPHD must be poised to respond to protect the public with trained, healthy health care providers. The flu surveillance begins at the end

of October and will continue through March.

She reminds the public it is never too late for a flu shot. Frequent flu shot clinics are available at work and to the public throughout the fall. Contact your local health provider for more information.

## Podcasting expands the message of PPHD

PPHD has found a new way of sharing messages with their communities and is inviting other area organizations to share in the resources provided by Podcasting Across Nebraska. Podcasting Across Nebraska is a program funded by the Nebraska Information Technology Council and the State of Nebraska.

Lieutenant Governor Rick Sheehy was in Alliance last spring to present the award of a Macintosh laptop computer and digital recording equipment to Jessica Davies of Panhandle Public Health, as the leader of the Podcasting Across the Panhandle coalition. About 20 regional participants took part in a training provided by the University of Nebraska extension staff.

Since that time PPHD has created two regional podcasts; the first is a walking tour of historic downtown Alliance for the Lied Main Street group there. The other is an educational program on West Nile Virus, created by PPHD staff for the general public. Both podcasts



Lieutenant Governor Rick Sheehy presents Jessica Daview of PPHD with a Macintosh laptop computer.

are available to download at [www.pphd.org](http://www.pphd.org).

In the future, PPHD hopes to continue to offer timely health information in a new media format

proven popular first by the youth, but now adopted by travelers and work out mavens everywhere. The format came of interest in the Panhandle in the beginning because of

*MPower3*  
Movement, Music, and More...

a women's fitness program called MPower3: Movement, Music and More.

MPower3 began September 30, 2006 and ended May 30, 2007. During those nine months, women and girls were encouraged to work out on a regular basis and earn the chance to win MP3 players and other grand prizes including a Dance! Dance! Revolution game, and iFit treadmill, a bicycle and helmet and packages from Becky's Day Spa in Scottsbluff and Alliance. More than 410 women and girls participated in the score card program across all 11 counties in the Panhandle.

The MPower3 program was funded by the Nebraska Office of Women's Health with support from

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant.

### Hospitals . . .

—from page seven

where from 11 to 25 beds, so their system is similar in format, but much more densely populated than the Panhandle system.

Several hospitals have requested copies in different (electronic) formats, Meyers said, letting us know they are using the PRMRS policies to develop their plans. "PRMRS did a wonderful job in building a foundation for others to look at their own plans or develop new plans. We're anxiously awaiting the next plan for alternative care sites."

## Scrub Club teaches the prevention of spreading germs



Public Health Nurse Betsy Horstman teaches a group of Panhandle elementary students about washing their hands. A good rule of thumb is to wash with hot soapy water and count to twenty slowly while scrubbing.

Only one in three adults washes their hands when they leave the restroom. Tomorrow's adults should do better thanks in no small part to a fun way to learn about the importance of hand washing through Panhandle Public Health.

Public health nurses, Betsy

Horstman of Hemingford, Becky Corman and Melody Leisy of Bridgeport make Scrub Club presentations in schools, libraries and child care centers. Most children do learn to wash up at preschool and the importance of coughing in the crook of their arm to avoid more germs on their hands between hand

washing.

The nurses said hand washing is not just a good habit for kids, but also an important factor affecting the health and economy of those around them. "In a national study, it was discovered there are 164 million lost school days due to illness," Corman said. "Not only are the missed days disruptive, but also expensive. Students are likely to share their illnesses with teachers and parents, causing missed work days for both and higher health care costs for families. It costs less than a penny to wash your hands, but this prevention can save a \$50 visit to the doctor."

For more information, games, posters, stickers and cartoons on the importance of children washing their hands, visit the Scrub Club website at [www.scrubclub.org](http://www.scrubclub.org). The site also has downloadable music, posters, computer wallpaper and screensavers for children, parents and teachers. There are also teacher's guides for educators wishing to use The Scrub Club program in their classrooms and tips for parents.

## PPHD nurses reach out to the community

Health care providers seem to be all around us when we visit the doctor's office or the hospital, of course. But in our day-to-day lives as we battle the little illnesses of the world and struggle to comprehend Medicaid or special prescription coverage we may wonder who to call. Oftentimes, young people especially worry about bothering a doctor or nurse when they're unsure if the problem is "serious enough."

Panhandle Public Health's outreach nurses Betsy Horstman, Becky Corman, and Melody Leisy reach out to the community to offer education and support in areas like early and regular screening, health care coverage and communicable disease, as well as other public health risks.

The nurses can also help providers with issues and concerns regarding their patients. If a patient seems to be having problems keeping appointments due to transportation problems or other issues, goes to the emergency room when they should be making an appointment or simply staying away due to lack

of paid coverage, the PPHD outreach nurses can help. Horstman, Corman and Leisy assist patients eligible for Medicaid or Kids Connection by helping them find appropriate health care providers, working through the forms and answering questions about when it's appropriate to call the doctor and when to make an appointment or visit the ER.

If a patient has problems with English as a second language or cannot find transportation to the doctor or hospital, the public health nurse will recognize that barrier and gather community resources to help resolve the issue.

In addition to public assistance, Horstman, Corman and Leisy offer presentations on health care issues for children such as the scrub club, brush'em up and child care policies, adult issues like being prepared for disaster or worries about the "bird flu." A public health nurse can be the public's link first line of defense and information for both every day and serious health care concerns, but is not a substitute for a regular health care provider.



## Coalitions work together to form safer and healthier Panhandle communities

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*

*Margaret Mead (1901 - 1978)*

In each of the counties in the Panhandle Public Health District there exists a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens working quietly to change the world. Community coalitions go by different names in each of the counties, but have much in common – working together on problems that affect families and children such as child abuse, underage drinking and community disorganization. Key stakeholders in each group include those same parents and children, health care, education, law enforcement, business, community and faith-based organizations, government and the media. In each coalition, a part-time community organizer (listed in bold) helps direct the group in regional efforts coordinated through the Panhandle Prevention Coalition, a working group of the Panhandle Partnership for Health and Human Services.

### **Banner County**

**Marie Parker** – The biggest change in Banner County can't be easily measured, but there is definitely a change in community attitude. School administrators are actively seeking out ways to encourage young people not to drink or use drugs. People are talking about adult problems with serving alcohol to minors. Keg parties in the parking lot may be a thing of the past.

### **Box Butte County**

**Mary Wernke** – Family Focus Coalition is in their third year of working with other SICA and DFC grantees to help prevent underage drinking. But the problem of teens drinking illegally does not stand alone. The coalition also helped raise awareness of child abuse through a blue ribbon campaign that included a photo contest and balloon launch.

### **Cheyenne County**

**Joe Luxa** – A new organization, Families and Youth Together will expand and sustain all after-school programs in the

area, building on the success of the Century 21 Community Learning Center there the past five years. In addition, the Cheyenne County Coalition, Kids Plus has been involved in annual server training for the city's Oktoberfest celebration and other interested businesses and established a successful teen night as an alternative to alcohol for the younger set – Rocktoberfest. The Cheyenne County Community Center has expanded youth activities and now offers additional scholarships for Kool Kids.

### **Dawes County**

**Sandy Roes**—After two years of regional planning, the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Nebraska Panhandle, Inc. opened their first unit in Chadron in October 2006. The family preservation team was a big supporter of the BGCP program – helping to recruit 250+ members and raise more than \$42,000 in the community. This all, club members helped plant red tulip bulbs during Red Ribbon Week to bloom next spring during April – alcohol awareness month as a service learning project with the partners of Chadron State College, Chadron Public Schools, Pine Ridge Job Corp and local businesses.

### **Deuel County**

**Judy Soper**—Deuel County has been so fortunate to have the communities come together for the awareness of the dangers of underage drinking. It was a problem we knew we had, but never tried to work together to address. Deuel County truly cares about their youth and are working together from every angle to help educate the community on both the youth and adult responsibility concerning this problem – not only for today, but for the future of our communities.

### **Garden County**

**Kyna Letandress and Rose Brassfield** – The coalition helped implement a 10 p.m. town siren, reminding parents to ask, "Where are the children right now?" The siren also serves as a reminder of the 11 p.m. curfew in Oshkosh. Closed campuses at the junior and senior high schools

eliminate students getting drunk or high at school. Both schools are also implementing substance abuse prevention curriculums each semester.

### **Kimball County**

**Mark Weber** – Kimball County is in their first year with an active coalition. A summer BBQ helped the coalition and community become well acquainted and built a foundation for future projects involving everyone.

### **Morrill County**

**Jamie Cranmore** – Our biggest success is really being a part of the effort with the school to adopt a random drug testing policy for our district, which was put into place at the beginning of this school year. We have also seen positive results (in the way of community involvement and parental participation) with our curriculum programs, especially All Stars. At last year's All Stars celebration, we had more than 200 community members attend.

### **Sheridan County**

**Sherry Retzlaff** – Gordon/Rushville schools are working to hire a school resource officer to serve as a law enforcement liaison in the schools. Sheridan County is working with Dawes County to determine the need for a juvenile holding facility in the northern tier of counties. The party patrol task force is in their second year of providing overtime for state and local officers to work cooperatively in controlling large parties of teens drinking. The curriculum Too Good for Drugs is being implemented in all Sheridan County Schools, K-5 and a walking/biking trail should be complete by spring, offering alternate activities for young adults and families, plus improving the community's image among youth.

### **Sioux County**

**Sandy Roes** – The Sioux County Schools will participate in the Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey in the fall of 2007. Members of the community were also involved in planning for maternal-child health issues in the region through Panhandle Public Health District.

## Community coalitions work to dispell myths surrounding underage drinking

Seen from one perspective, a community can be cold and unfeeling. But, from a different perspective, the community members are warm individuals, willing to give the shirt off their back to help a stranger in need. The same perspective that clouds every person's objectivity varies widely among generations in regards to underage drinking.

For the last three years, local community coalitions in each Panhandle county have been working as groups to dispel some of the myths surrounding underage drinking that are especially prevalent in a small, rural community:

"Everybody's doing it."

"Adults drink and drive all the time." and, a personal favorite, "There's nothing else to do in

*"Everybody's doing it."*

*"There is nothing else to do in this town."*

this town." A regional survey of adults, most parents to minors and some to adult children, was completed in early fall of 2007 to help put some data behind the misconceptions that lead some to believe most adults think underage drinking is okay and are willing to provide the alcohol to their kids.

Nearly 300 adults from 13 western Nebraska counties answered a short list of questions indicating their grasp of the problem and their potential contribution to the issue, good or bad. Almost every one of the adults said it is easy for youth to obtain alcohol in their community and agreed providing alcohol to

—turn to page eleven

## ★ PSAR Animals on the Trail. . .

—from pages six & seven

ters puts the side pull bridle on his horse, the animal knows it's going out to search and not to work cattle. The dogs are also excited when the team laces them into their vests with the bells and reflective tape.

The U.S. Border Patrol uses dogs to search for illegal aliens crossing the border, potentially undetected in the dark. Nowacki is talking with them about using horses, as well, Lotspeich said.

Many people are skeptical of using horses as search animals, she continued. The team has done demonstrations for law enforcement and youth groups and the skeptics quickly become believers when the horses walk directly over to a well-hidden stranger yards away in a brush or thicket. The animal treats come out and the game's over. For today.

The Ponderosa Search & Rescue Team is one of four citizen corps councils from across the Panhandle, recently organized as the Panhandle Citizen Corps Network. The four councils, including others in Scottsbluff/Gering, Rushville and Gordon, will work

together to train others, not only in search and rescue, but also as volunteers to assist fire and police in the event of a disaster and as Neighborhood Watch patrols – neighbors looking out for one another.

The PCCN was created to develop leadership in areas where smaller towns cannot work alone. The regional network of councils will provide fiscal and administrative oversight, with representatives from every county, the local health departments, emergency managers and the existing groups, such as the search and rescue team. The PSAR will be the lead group in developing a pet preparedness plan, to be implemented in the event of a disaster.

This information is provided as a service of the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission and Panhandle Citizen Corps Network. For additional information on how to prepare yourself and your community, contact Jessica Davies, Panhandle Public Health District, at 866-701-7173 or the commission at 800-291-8911.

## “The Summer The Town Bit Back”

Check it out at your local library

It's an adventure unlike any other – an army of invading mosquitoes set up housekeeping in a small town, much like most in western Nebraska. But when the city fathers see the damage done (West Nile Virus is primarily spread by the bite of the female Culex mosquito) the army of cartoon bloodsuckers is sent packing.

“The Summer the Town Bit Back” is a child's storybook designed to inspire young children in helping fight the bite of mosquitoes, the most common cause of West Nile Virus in humans. Panhandle Public Health District shared the story with nearly every library in the region this summer as an added measure in educating the public about WNV.

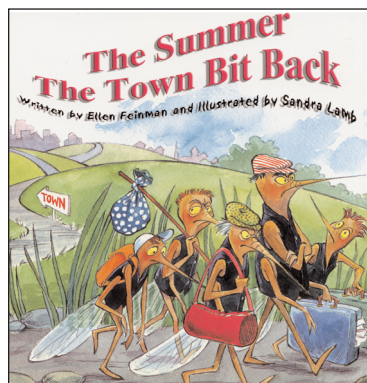
Stephanie O'Connor, children's librarian at the Alliance Public Library, said the story book was popular among the younger set at the APL story hour, but even more popular were the activity books. “We even had parents coming back asking for extra copies for

their older children,” O'Connor said.

Since the story book was read to the preschoolers it has also been checked out by youth and some parents both for entertainment value and for the children to learn with their folks about the dangers of West Nile Virus.

In Nebraska, there were 146 documented clinical cases and three deaths caused by West Nile Virus as of October 27, 2007, with cases continuing to be reported. Positive human cases were cited in seven of the 11 Panhandle counties this year. Both numbers are down from 2005, however in 2006 there were only two deaths in Nebraska.

Dog and horses are also susceptible to the virus, also through the bite of the mosquito. Public health measures revolve around getting the public to apply DEET repellent liberally on skin and clothing, especially around dusk and dawn when the mosquitoes are more prevalent. Other preventive measures include wearing



long sleeves and long pants when working and playing outdoors.

Lastly, homeowners should drain standing water around the home, farm and ranch. Water in bird baths, wading pools and old tires provide prime breeding grounds for more mosquitoes.

Public Health Nurses Betsy Horstman and Melody Leisy distributed the story book and matching activity books to libraries, clinics, summer camps and daycares throughout the Panhandle this summer.

**FREE LIFESAVING  
RADON DETECTION KITS**

**Yes, I want to test my home for radon. Please rush me my free radon detection kit.**

Radon is a radioactive gas occurring naturally in one of every 15 homes in the U.S. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer. Testing for radon is simple. Just follow the directions on the package and return the entire kit to the manufacturer for analysis at no additional cost. You'll get the results along with information about corrective measures you can take to lower your radon level, if necessary.

Get your free radon detection kit from the Panhandle Public Health District by calling toll free 1-866-701-7173. Retail value \$30.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this coupon to Panhandle Public Health District,  
P.O. Box 337, Hemingford, NE 69348  
or call 308-487-3600 or toll free 866-701-7173.

## PPHD Offers Free Radon Test

To make it easier for Nebraskans to test their homes for radon, Panhandle Public Health District will offer free radon test kits for patrons submitting the coupon found on this page.

This is an opportune time for Nebraskans to test for radon in their homes, Jessica Davies, Wellness and Volunteer Coordinator for PPHD, said. During the fall and winter, homes are closed up and can trap the toxic gas.

“Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer for people who have never smoked,” she said. “This is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that is present in most Nebraska homes. Everyone should test for radon.”

The EPA estimates that about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year are radon-related, second only to tobacco-related lung cancer deaths.

Radon comes from the decay of naturally occurring uranium in the earth's soil and can accumulate indoors to dangerous levels. It enters homes through cracks or holes in concrete floors or walls, sump pits, and drinking water from private wells. Once trapped inside an enclosed space, radon can accumulate. People should take action to mitigate the radon level in their home if it is 4 Pico curies per liter or above, a health standard set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“About 50% of all test kits analyzed from the Panhandle have come back high,” Davies said. “We strongly encourage people to get their homes checked and are offering test kits free to residents of the Panhandle during this time.”

The EPA recommends that houses with radon levels above the health standard be fixed to reduce the risk of developing lung cancer. Additional information and a list of trained professionals who can help people whose homes test high is available at [www.hhss.ne.gov/radon](http://www.hhss.ne.gov/radon).

“The bottom line, this is one environmental toxin that is easy to identify and reduce exposure to,” Davies concluded.

For more information or to request a free radon test kit, call PPHD toll free at 866-701-7173 or 308-487-3600.

## Personal Health Assessment . . . —from page one

you count the fact my regular diet is all about chocolate, diet root beer and nachos.

On the plus side, the report revealed I am not at risk for alcoholism. Judging by the fact I haven't had a drink in years that was a no-brainer. I don't use tobacco and have few friends who do. The evidence there is also overwhelming, but bears repeating: QUIT NOW!

Good vehicle safety is another place the healthy individual can score well. I did, despite the friendly warning from Officer Trout of the Alliance Police Department yesterday. Injuries are a major cause of poor health and

motor vehicle crashes (not accidents) are the leading cause of death in the Panhandle.

There are things we all need to work on. I scored poorly in the top three: nutrition, exercise and blood pressure. I think I know one person who eats right all the time, but I realize we can all do better. Portion control and choosing the right foods are important tools to learn and you've already taken the first step by picking up this report with more valuable information.



Increasing physical activity is easier when you join a program or group – again you'll find several listed in this report. NLighten, MPower3 and Move It are all physical activity campaigns promoted through PPHD and available everywhere. Physical activity doesn't have to be strenuous – if it were, I wouldn't be there. I jogged. Once.

Please join me in taking the personal health assessment. It's quick, it's easy and it's interesting. I also invite you to share your results with others as I have done here.

Beyond the humiliation and overbearing bragging rights you'll gain, it's a powerful incentive to do more with a partner in getting it right.

My daughter has suggested we train for a half-marathon. I think she's adopted but I'm considering the idea both for my own health and for my child's. As a parent, I realize the value in being an example to my children. Maybe your partner will be a spouse or a friend – but choose a partner and Plan to Live.

*Mary Wernke  
Guest Columnist*

## Underage Drinking . . . —from page ten

ized starting to drink at an early age leads to problems with alcoholism as an adult. Evaluator Mark deKraai with the UNL Public Policy Center said the survey results were not scientifically selected, but the results do identify trends in attitude. “The surveys are a useful tool to promote discussion about important issues,” deKraai concluded.

In another tool to create more awareness of the issues, the Community Hero campaign was estab-

lished in the fall of 2005 to honor adults who pledge not to provide alcohol to teens. Dozens of couples and young adults stepped forward to affirm their beliefs in the decision not to buy booze for kids.

The media campaign is based on a black-and-white theme. The simplicity of the design reflects the simplicity of the message. “It's a black and white issue,” said Prevention Coordinator Deanne Armstrong of the Panhandle Prevention Coalition, a working group of

the Panhandle Partnership for Health and Human Services.

The Community Hero campaign was enhanced this fall to include an additional message: Everyone can be a community hero “in training.” The message in the expanded campaign is directed at adults learning about the laws and dangers of buying or providing alcohol to minors.

From the 21-year-old James Dean-type with a high school girlfriend he supplies beer and wine

for to the parents giving prom parties with a keg of beer and a bowl of keys to keep the kids safe, statistics show teens aren't buying their alcohol from the retail merchant. They're getting it at home or from a friend, with or without their parent's knowledge.

In early October, the campaign launched a website, [www.Communityhero.org](http://www.Communityhero.org), featuring facts and figures about the many issues surrounding underage drinking.

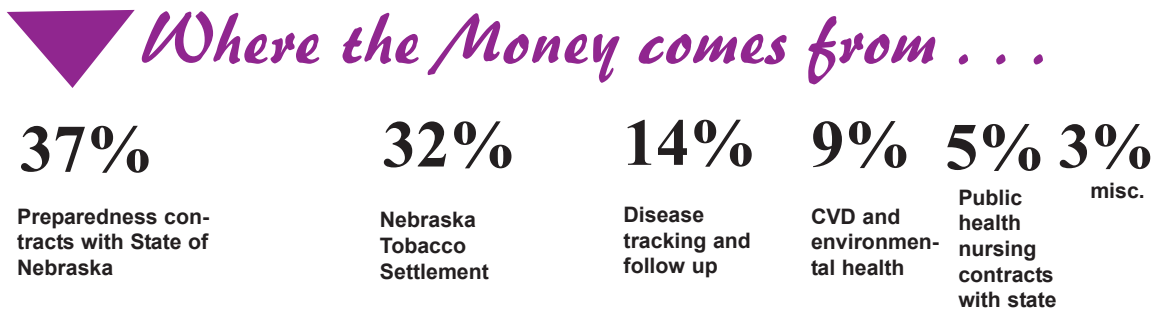
# PPHD Financials -- Fiscal Year 2007

## Balance Sheet, June 30, 2007

Assets		Liabilities	
Cash & Equivalent	\$115,738	Accounts Payable . . .	\$8,444
Investments . . . . .	\$300,000	Accrued Payroll	
Accounts Receivable. .	\$3,259	Liabilities . . . . .	\$28,050
Inventory . . . . .	\$5,719	Total Liabilities . . . .	\$36,494
Property and Equipment, Net of Accumulated Depreciation . . . . .	\$94,177		
<b>Total Assets . . . . .</b>	<b>\$518,893</b>		
		Net Assets	
		Invested in Capital Assets, Net of Related Debt . . .	\$94,177
		Unrestricted . . . . .	\$388,222
		<b>Total Net Assets . . .</b>	<b>\$482,399</b>
		<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets . . . . .</b>	<b>\$518,893</b>



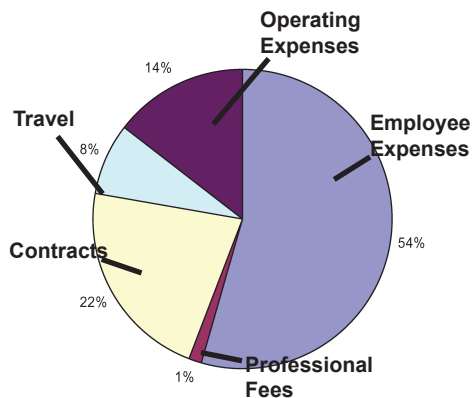
Sara Sulzbach



## *Where the Money goes . . .*

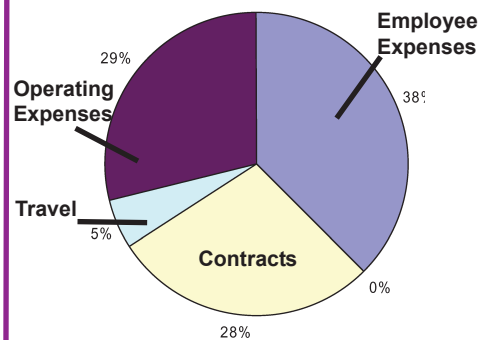
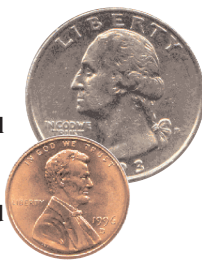
### 32% Protection

\$200,393 is the annual budget for protection.  
 \$126,488 PPHD Preparedness  
 \$73,905 PRMRS Preparedness



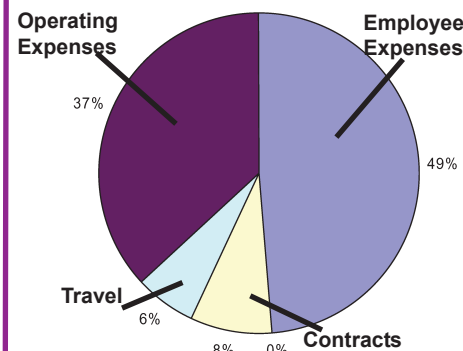
### 26% Prevention

\$162,813 is the annual budget for prevention.  
 \$55,071 CVD  
 \$18,619 Maternal Child Health  
 \$9,147 WNV  
 \$76,300 Disease Surveillance  
 \$3,676 Radon



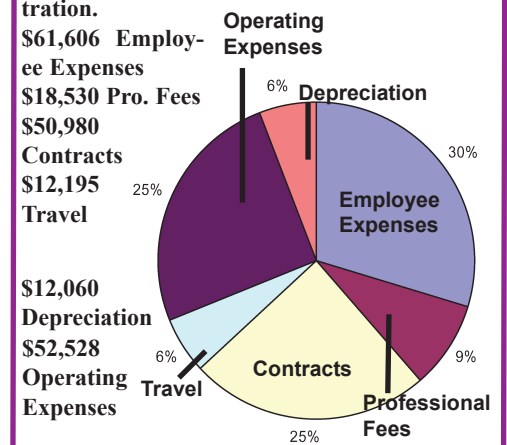
### 9% Promotion

\$57,568 is the annual budget for promotion.  
 \$19,922 Children's Outreach  
 \$37,646 Public Health Nursing



### 33% General Admin.

\$207,899 is the annual budget for general administration.  
 \$61,606 Employee Expenses  
 \$18,530 Pro. Fees  
 \$50,980 Contracts  
 \$12,195 Travel  
 \$12,060 Depreciation  
 \$52,528 Operating Expenses



2007 Board of Directors			
<b>Banner County</b> Bob Gifford, County Commissioner Marie Parker, Community-Spirited Citizen	<b>Box Butte County</b> Charles Weston, County Commissioner Carolyn Jones, Community-Spirited Citizen	<b>Cheyenne County</b> Harold Winkelman, County Commissioner Kelly Utley, Community-Spirited Citizen	<b>Dawes County</b> Roger Wess, County Commissioner Darrel Knote, Community-Spirited Citizen
<b>Kimball County</b> Larry Brower, County Commissioner Kim Woods, Community-Spirited Citizen	<b>Morrill County</b> Bill Juelfs, County Commissioner Kay Anderson, Community-Spirited Citizen	<b>Sheridan County</b> Dan Kling, County Commissioner Stella Otte, Community-Spirited Citizen	<b>Sioux County</b> Greg Asa, County Commissioner Adam Edmund, Community-Spirited Citizen
			<b>Garden County</b> Terry McCord, County Commissioner Terri Gortemaker, Community-Spirited Citizen
			<b>Deuel County</b> Clint Bailey, County Commissioner Judy Soper, Community-Spirited Citizen
			<b>At Large</b> Dr. Frederick Koch, MD (resigned, currently open) Dr. Justin Moody, DDS