Environmental Health Staff Celebrates State Award

Kudos to the staff at the Health Department’s Environmental Health Bureau (EHB) for receiving the Excellence in Environmental Health Award from the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health (CCDEH).

The award showcases outstanding programs which are innovative, creative and effective in providing quality environmental health services. CCDEH is comprised of Environmental Health Directors from all 58 California counties plus four cities.

This is the second time in the last four years the EHB has received this award. This year’s award was for its food safety education program.

“This is a great honor for all EHB staff who have contributed to the success of our food safety training, conferences and outreach,” says John Ramirez, Environmental Health Bureau Director, who adds that the Bureau’s work received many accolades from other directors at CCDEH. “It was an honor to receive this award.”
Here is some background on the Bureau’s food safety training and education programs highlighted by the award:

As part of food inspection efforts, Bureau staff noticed that many facilities did not provide adequate or consistent training to food service workers. Long before Food Handler Cards were required (2010), EHB staff established no-cost food safety training that was available to all permitted food facility employees. Courses were offered in Spanish and when the first classes were offered in 2007, they filled up right away. Feedback from attendees confirmed that EHB staff had found and filled a training gap - food service workers were appreciative that county staff took the time to train them and that the trainer was a native Spanish speaker.

Food service training is now held up to four times a year and is also offered in English. To date, there have been 23 training sessions and 1,200 attendees. Additionally, a Food Safety Conference for owners, operators and employees of permitted food facilities was created to teach about food safety issues and practices as well as new regulations.

Safety efforts were expanded when the Bureau and local food industry established the Food Safety Advisory Council (FSAC) of Monterey County and in 2008, the two partnered with National Restaurant Association Solutions for the first Food Safety Conference. Now in its sixth year, the conference averages nearly 200 attendees. The theme of the first conference was “Take Action to Prevent an Allergic Reaction.” This year’s theme was “Code Breakers: Solving the Mysteries of the California Retail Food Code” and topics included identifying legal food sources, fortifying worker health and hygiene and a panel discussion about the Health Code featuring Environmental Health Bureau staff pose with their award.
industry professionals and regulatory staff from various central coast and bay area jurisdictions.

EHB plans to continue expanding its outreach efforts in the years to come. The Excellence in Environmental Health Award highlights EHB’s vision of an informed community as it continues to strive for protection of public health through quality service, industry partnership and educational opportunities.

**Information Technology Goes ‘Phishing’ to Test Cyber Awareness**

Most of us have had plenty of experience taking tests. Last month, every county employee with email was given a surprise test from the Information Technology Department (ITD), and we didn’t even know about it until it was over.

The good news is that most of us passed.

Here’s what happened: on October 14th, the County’s Information Security team, in coordination with the County’s Department Information Security Officers, conducted a countywide phishing test.

Phishing is a form of social engineering where an attacker will send you a specially crafted email message, hoping to fool you into clicking on a link, fall for a scam or download malware. ITD sends out a lot of important information to county employees about cyber security awareness and how to spot and avoid scammers. Now it was time to see who has been paying attention.

“All it takes is one click by one user to give a bad guy access to our network,” says Dan Kern, the County’s Chief Information Security Officer. “We are constantly educating our users about phishing and the dangers involved. A phishing test is part of our security awareness program, to show users how easy it is to be fooled and measure our alertness.”

For the phishing test, an email that impersonated the County’s Service Desk was sent to all County employees informing them that their password was changed and if they hadn’t changed it, to then click on a link to change their password immediately. Employees who
clicked on that link were taken to an awareness page to help educate them on phishing and being suspicious about unexpected emails.

“Overall, as an organization, we did pretty well,” says Kern. “We had a 7% click rate. Government organizations in general average a click rate of around 24% so I am very proud of our users for being vigilant.”

Kern says phishing happens to government agencies all the time. It’s much easier for hackers to phish than try to punch through advanced technical defenses - all they need is for one user to click on a link that will give them remote access. Once in, cyber thieves will try to steal legitimate credentials and gain access to valuable information.

More information about phishing and how to protect yourself can be found here. The County’s Information Security team has also produced an online security awareness training presentation.