The Environmental Health Division of Contra Costa Health Services is here to protect you. Every day, Environmental Health is working in the community to ensure retail food doesn’t make you sick, public pools are clean and safe, and that natural resources are not being contaminated by human activity.
CONSUMER PROTECTION

Disease and sickness can be caused by eating unsafe food, drinking or swimming in bad water, and even from tattoos or body piercings. Environmental Health protects the public by enforcing safety requirements for retail food outlets, public swimming pools, small water systems, and body art practitioners and facilities.

KEEPING FOOD SAFE

Environmental Health specialists inspect all permitted food facilities in the county — everything from high-end bistro and deli to grocery stores and hot dog pushcarts — to ensure they are storing, preparing and handling food in a safe and sanitary way. Environmental Health reviews all construction and remodeling plans to ensure the facilities are built in a manner to promote food safety. Environmental Health investigates food-poisoning complaints and tries to determine the source of foodborne-illness outbreaks. And when food manufacturers issue recalls, it’s up to Environmental Health to audit retailers to verify that contaminated products have been removed from store shelves.

BY THE NUMBERS*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food facilities permitted</td>
<td>4,257</td>
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<tr>
<td>Routine food facility inspections</td>
<td>9,112</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foodborne illness investigations</td>
<td>206</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan reviews for restaurants completed</td>
<td>453</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety trainings for food handlers</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan reviews for public pools completed</td>
<td>41</td>
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*Data from 2011
**KEEPING RECREATION SAFE AND FUN**
Swimming is the third most popular recreational activity in the United States, so it is important that public pools are clean and safe. Environmental Health does this by regularly inspecting 1,600 existing public swimming facilities—including pools and spas at apartment buildings, condominiums and community centers—and reviewing design plans for new pools. Ensuring that pools are adequately maintained and well-designed reduces the chances of germs being spread and of injury or drowning.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
You can see the results of recent health inspections of food facilities in Contra Costa County by using the Restaurant Inspection Database on the Environmental Health website [cchealth.org/eh/](http://cchealth.org/eh/)

Soon there will be an app that will allow people to search inspection results for food outlets from their smartphones.
ENSURING SAFE TATTOOS AND BODY PIERCINGS
Unsanitary body art practices can lead to serious diseases like hepatitis B, hepatitis C and AIDS. As of July 1, 2012, Environmental Health began applying new statewide rules requiring tattoo artists, body piercers and the places where they work to meet certain hand-washing, sterilizing, training, and record-keeping standards. Environmental Health will issue permits to the facilities, register the body artists/piercers and conduct annual inspections.

ENSURING SAFE DRINKING WATER
Environmental Health works with 135 small water systems to implement federal and state regulations that are in place to make sure that the cleanest, safest and most reliable drinking water possible is delivered to approximately 13,000 users.

DID YOU KNOW?
People under the age of 18 can receive body piercings only with written permission from a parent or guardian. Piercings on a minor cannot be done in the nipples or genital areas, even with written permission.
RESOURCE PROTECTION
Protecting the environment is a critical part of Environmental Health’s mission. From monitoring solid waste to overseeing sewage spill cleanups to regulating septic tanks, Environmental Health is vigilant in safeguarding natural resources from contamination.

SAFE WASTE HANDLING AND DISPOSAL
If not dealt with properly, the waste residents and businesses produce can pose health risks to the public. Environmental Health makes sure these wastes are managed and disposed of correctly.

- **Solid Waste:** The per capita production is 4.4 pounds of trash per day! If not handled the right way, municipal solid waste can create odors, catch on fire, harbor vermin like insects and rats, and act as a breeding ground for human pathogens that cause disease. Environmental Health oversees the proper processing and disposal of solid waste at two landfills, five transfer stations, six compost facilities, and one construction and demolition debris processor.

- **Medical Waste:** Blood-contaminated items and used syringes can transmit diseases. Environmental Health
oversees hundreds of medical waste generators such as hospitals and dental offices.

- **Old Tires:** Piles of waste tires can pose fire hazards and harbor vermin like mosquitoes, which spread West Nile virus. Environmental Health investigates generators and haulers of tires to make sure they follow proper handling and disposal procedures. In 2011, Environmental Health inspected 363 generators of tire waste, inspected a dozen registered waste tire haulers, and cited 33 illegal haulers.

- **Garbage Dumping:** Illegal dumping is a major problem in some parts of the county. Illegally dumped trash can provide food and habitat for rats and other vermin, and potentially affect surface waters. Environmental Health actively investigates illegal dumping on public right of ways and, in some cases, on private property.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**
California leads the nation with a 65% recycling rate for all materials, and today recycling supports more than 140,000 green jobs in California. The new state policy is to achieve a **75% recycling rate** by the year 2020.

**PROTECTING WATER RESOURCES**
While surface water and other water resources have been impaired by human activity elsewhere in the state, that’s not the case in Contra Costa County. Environmental Health keeps water safe by monitoring the following:
Storm Drains and Surface Water Runoff: In Contra Costa County, storm drains flow directly to local creeks, San Francisco Bay, San Leandro Reservoir, and the Delta with no treatment. Storm water pollution is a serious problem for wildlife dependent on waterways and for the people who live near polluted waters. To prevent contamination of these resources, Environmental Health inspects horse stables to ensure that bacteria and chemicals in animal waste and horse-care products do not flow into surface water sheds. Environmental Health also verifies that restaurants in unincorporated parts of the county are not dumping waste like detergents, mop water, grease or oil into storm drains.

Sewage Spills: Environmental Health is notified by the state emergency warning system or the sheriff’s office when a sewage spill occurs in the county. Environmental Health ensures the spill doesn’t get into storm drains or contaminate surface waters. Environmental Health also makes sure a spill is properly cleaned up.

Septic Tanks: Improperly designed or poorly constructed septic systems can result in sewage leaks that can contaminate groundwater. Environmental Health reviews and inspects design plans for septic tanks to prevent such accidents from happening. Environmental Health has an ongoing monitoring program for certain types of septic systems that are more prone to problems.

Wells: When underground wells (such as water wells and monitoring wells) are installed or removed, it’s critical they are constructed or dismantled in a way that doesn’t pose a threat of contamination to the county’s groundwater. Environmental Health reviews well design plans, issues construction permits, and conducts inspections during the drilling to make sure wells will be installed or destroyed in a safe way.
**DID YOU KNOW?**

Contra Costa is an area that faces threats such as earthquakes, flooding, industrial accidents and bioterrorism. In the event of a natural or man-made disaster, Environmental Health will play a vital role in responding to the crisis and restoring normalcy. **Environmental Health will, among other things, help restore water supplies, investigate reports of sewage spills, and perform damage assessments at retail food facilities, private wells and septic systems.** In order to be ready to react in an emergency, Environmental Health participates in emergency response drills and communicates and coordinates with other response entities like fire and law enforcement.