Why consider cumulative impacts? (and how?)

Amy D. Kyle, PhD MPH
University of California Berkeley
School of Public Health
<adkyle@berkeley.edu>
Port of Oakland
Many environmental factors
Newer scientific knowledge

- Common pathways for effects that involve many compounds
- Some people much more sensitive
- Health disparities are significant and partly related to environment
- Increases in environmental diseases
What we do now

• Pollutant by pollutant
• Source by source
• Single medium (air or water or food)
Change focus: from “single agent or stressor”
Change focus: to what happens in communities
Environmental factors

• **Contaminant source approach**
  - Air pollution (indoor and outdoor), water pollution, drinking water, land contamination (sites)
  - Dusts (indoors) and soils (outdoors)
  - Consumer products, workplaces

• **Positive factors**
  - Green space, access to recreation areas, walkability
Non-environmental factors

• People and communities
  - Susceptibility (e.g., kids)
  - Vulnerability (e.g., poverty)
  - Health status (elevated disease)
  - Resources and resiliency

• All interact with environment
California Environmental Protection Agency

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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACTION PLAN
Cumulative impacts means exposures, public health or environmental effects from the combined emissions and discharges, in a geographic area, including environmental pollution from all sources . . . Impacts will take into account sensitive populations and socio-economic factors, where applicable and to the extent data are available.
Precautionary approach means taking anticipatory action to protect public health or the environment if a reasonable threat of serious harm exists based upon the best available science and other relevant information, even if absolute and undisputed scientific evidence is not available to assess the exact nature and extent of risk.
How can we think about this?

- **Form to follow function**
  - Allow methods that describe attributes
  - Cumulative impacts and vulnerability
- Don’t leave out important stuff
- Consider all sectors
- Open discussion and process
How can we think about this?

• Expand beyond methods quantify cause and effect
• Address varied factors
  - “enough is enough”
  - Indexing or scaling
  - High-medium-low or percentiles
  - Trends
Conclusion

• Many environmental factors
  - Not all separate or independent
• Find ways to understand this
• Sensitive population attributes
• New methods for decisions
• Consistent with larger move to more sustainable communities
Amy D. Kyle <adkyle@berkeley.edu>
http://envirohealth.berkeley.edu/

Thanks!