

Washington County Public Health & Environment: Health Equity, Right Here and Now

Washington County Public Health and Environment is committed to increasing health equity and asked key questions to focus attention : **How do we begin?**

“How can we incorporate health equity into existing, everyday work?”

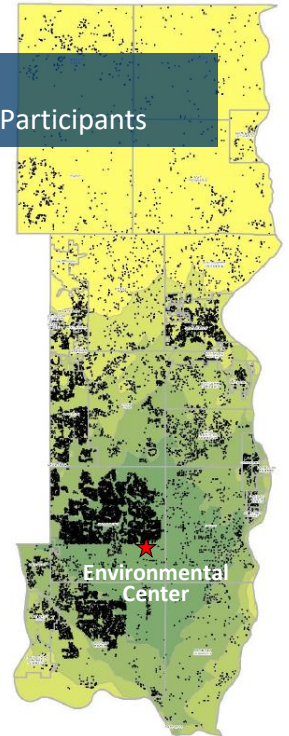
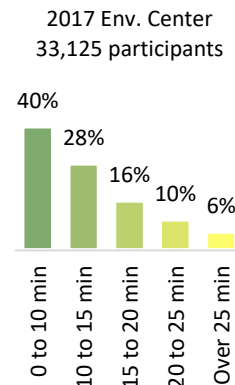
While updating its Waste Management Master Plan in 2017 staff realized that some residents drive 30 to 40 miles—each way -- to reach the Environmental Center and drop off household hazardous waste (HHW). Staff took action:

- **Selected a tool to evaluate** the existing HHW program
- **Engaged with community members** in the northern part of the county
- **Used human-centered design** to identify barriers to proper disposal
- **Surveyed current users** of the Environmental Center
- **Mapped gaps** in HHW collection services
- **Shared findings** with the county board
- **Developed options for increasing HHW collection services**, and **evaluated ways to communicate** with northern residents about them

“My advice to another department: Pick a project. Pick a tool, and see where it goes. Don’t be concerned with doing it perfectly the first time.”

What’s next? The county’s Community Environmental Resource Team now includes health equity in each project charter, another team is developing a health equity toolkit for project planning and implementation, and Public Health and Environment is reconsidering its current competitive grant funding system, which appears to put some high-need communities at a disadvantage.

2017 Drive Time for Environmental Center Participants



KEYS TO SUCCESS

- **Apply principles to existing work.** To make health equity concepts and tools more concrete, apply them to a program you already know well.
- **Try something new.** You have to start somewhere. You likely won’t be perfect from the outset, but opportunities to learn and improve.
- **Health equity is continuous.** Be alert for new and unexpected opportunities.
- **Communicate.** Ask, listen, clarify, and reflect with partners and community members. Everyone is part of the solution.