



## AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

# GETTING ALARMED: IMPROVING CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTION

Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

### THE PROBLEM

Research has shown that lower income families are less likely to use carbon monoxide detectors properly. In Eau Claire County, nearly a quarter of households have incomes of less than \$26,000. According to CDC data, the county also ranks in the highest 25% of counties for housing costs, poverty, and aging housing. Staff at the Eau Claire City-County Health Department used data from the Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking Program to initiate a project that would increase carbon monoxide detector use among low-income populations. Through this project, they aimed to better understand trends in carbon monoxide poisonings and disseminate more effective prevention messages.

### THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S SOLUTION

The project team trained staff in their own agency to talk about carbon monoxide poisoning and offer free detectors to low income clients in their Women, Infants, and Children and Nurse Family Partnership programs. They also worked with their home inspection staff and supplied them with detectors to offer residents when needed. They partnered with the Eau Claire Fire Department to discuss their carbon monoxide-related calls and gave them detectors to distribute to residents. A strategic partnership with the Augusta Senior and Community Center helped the project team distribute detectors to low income seniors living in the most rural parts of the county.

### THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

In total, the team and its set of new partners distributed 315 carbon monoxide detectors to their target audiences, and completed even more outreach through community events and presentations. The project raised the profile of CO poisoning prevention in Eau Claire and created a unified front to address it among governmental and non-governmental agencies. These partners now share additional knowledge with each other. For example, from their partnership with the fire department, health department staff obtained details about the circumstances surrounding the city's carbon monoxide-related emergency calls. Staff are using this information to improve existing messaging and have identified new populations—including ice anglers—to target in future projects.

EXPLORE YOUR COUNTY'S  
CARBON MONOXIDE DATA:

[dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht)

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM  
Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

[dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht) | OCTOBER 2019 | [dhstracking@wi.gov](mailto:dhstracking@wi.gov)  
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