



Plumas County  
Public Health Agency  
Environmental Health Division

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2009**

# Plumas County Environmental Health 2009 Annual Report

The practice of environmental health can best be described as those aspects of human health and disease that are determined by conditions in the environment. The interrelationship between man's impact on the environment, the environment's impact on man, and promoting an environment that enhances human health and well-being are the cornerstones of environmental health.

Plumas County Environmental Health seeks to preserve the environment and enhance public health through outreach, education, planning and sensible application of environmental health principles, laws and statutes. Plumas County Environmental Health's primary role is to implement programs and enforce regulations that protect human health and the environment.

## STAFFING

Environmental Health is a Division of the county's Public Health Agency. The Division consists of a director, one clerical staff, and five field staff. Field staff are Hazardous Materials Specialists and Registered Environmental Health Specialists, who have background, education, training and state certification in their field of practice.

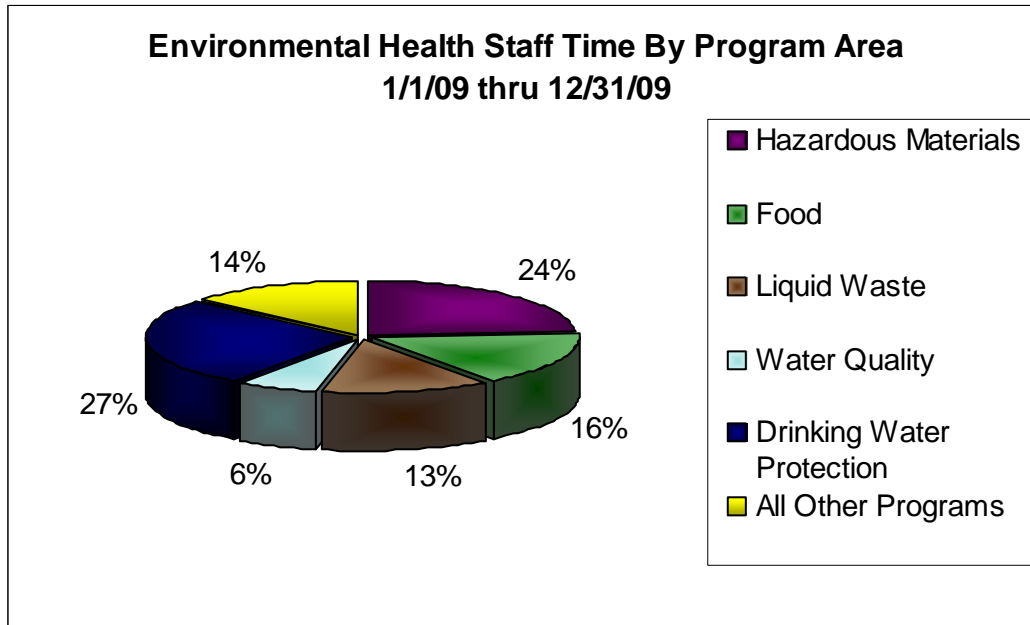
Environmental Health's main office is in the Health and Human Services Center in Quincy. This office is generally staffed Monday through Friday, 8am to 5pm but closed during lunch and holidays. We also maintain a satellite office in the Chester Civic Center. This office is generally staffed Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings or by appointment.

## PROGRAMS

In Plumas County, Environmental Health services are generally grouped into one of ten core program areas. The amount of time spent in each program area depends on a variety of risk factors as well as the service needs of the community. In Plumas County these ten environmental health programs include:

- Drinking Water Protection
- Hazardous Materials Management
- Food Safety
- Liquid Waste Management
- Solid Waste Management
- Water Quality Assurance
- Land Use and Development
- Rabies and Vector Control
- Recreational Health
- Housing and Institution Safety

In 2009, staff time was allocated according to the chart below.

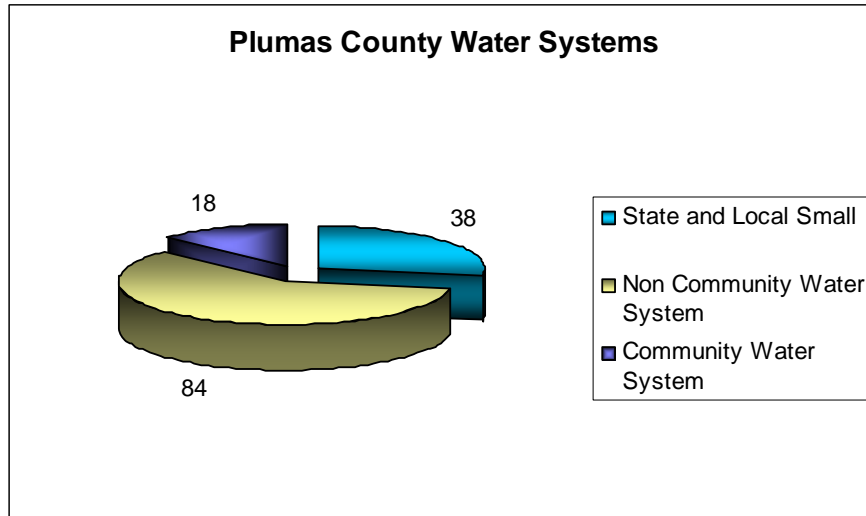


Some notable activities in the primary program areas are summarized as follows:

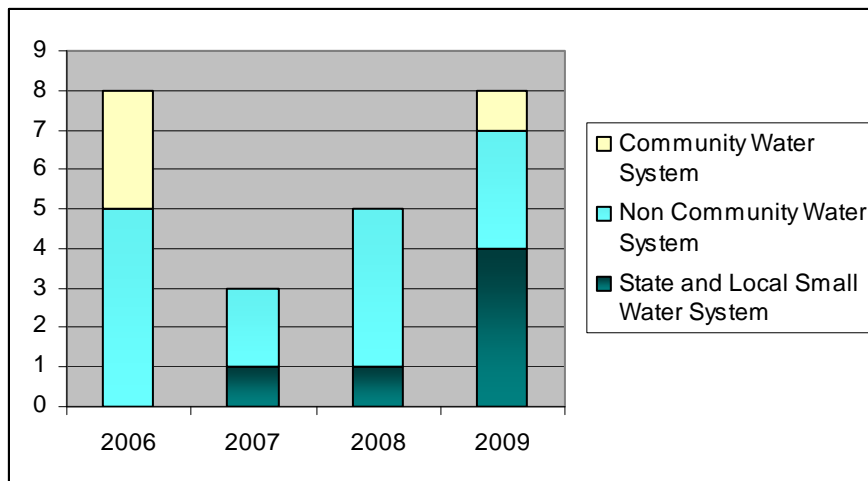
#### DRINKING WATER PROTECTION

Ensuring safe and potable drinking water supplies is a vital function of Environmental Health. In 2005, Environmental Health was certified as the Local Primacy Agency (LPA) by the State Department of Health Services. This designation provides water system purveyors and operators a local contact and resource in helping protect drinking water quality. 2009 marks the fourth full year of successful program implementation and approximately one quarter of our staff resources are dedicated to this effort.

Environmental Health monitors drinking water quality of 140 drinking water systems throughout the county. These include non community systems such as resorts and campgrounds, small systems serving less than 15 connections, and community systems with up to 200 connections. These systems serve drinking water to over twenty-two thousand residents and visitors to Plumas County annually. The number and type of regulated systems subject to our regulation and oversight are as follows:



To ensure water provided by these systems is safe to drink, Environmental Health reviews nearly 2,000 bacteriological reports every year. Whenever drinking water quality does not meet established standards, the system operator must advise its customers. If there is an immediate risk to human health, the system operator must issue a Boil Water Advisory. The number of Boil Water Advisories issued is a good indicator of overall drinking water quality, and is a key part of public health protection. Data on the number of Boil Water Advisories issued the past four years is charted below:



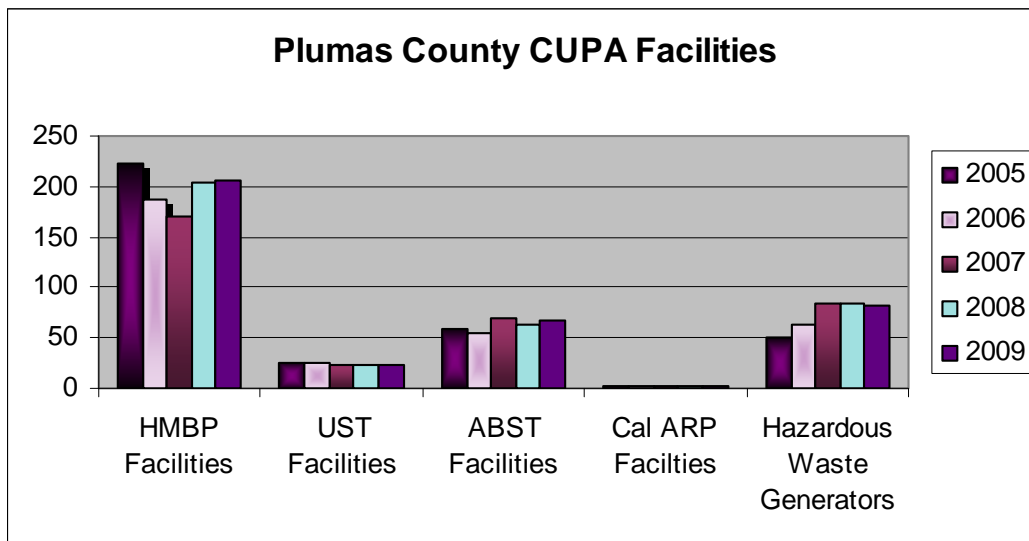
Less than one half of one percent of the 2009 bacteriological reports indicated a possible drinking water problem thus confirming the overall drinking water quality for public water systems in Plumas County remains excellent.

## HAZARDOUS MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

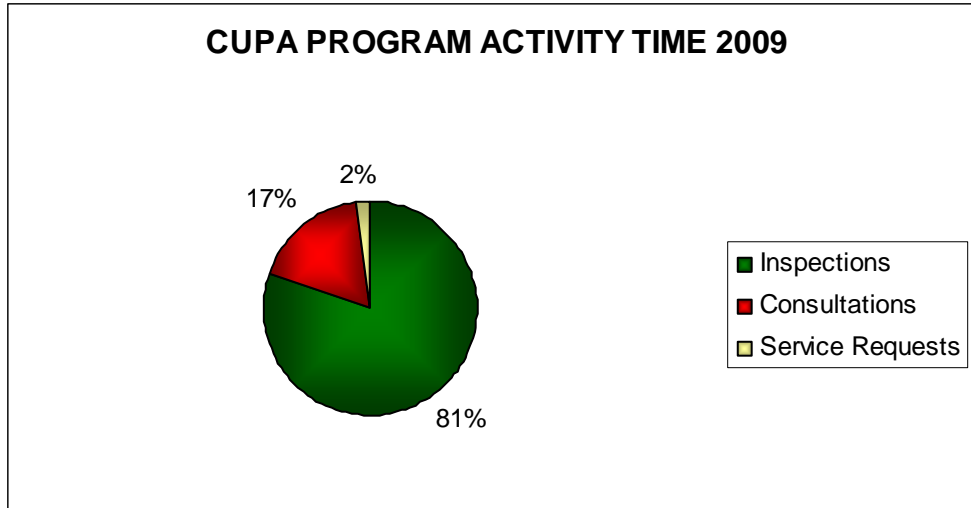
Our hazardous materials management program is designed to reduce the risk of exposure to chemicals or contamination. This comprehensive program (also referred to as the CUPA program or the Unified Program) includes management of chemicals in underground tanks, above ground tanks, wastes generated through industrial processes, risk management planning, and pollution prevention. We also work closely with emergency response agencies to plan, prepare, and respond to accidental releases. In 2009, approximately one quarter of staff resources were dedicated to this program.



Program requirements are based on the likelihood or consequences of a release. The chart below shows the number of businesses subject to each of the program areas, including basic inventory reporting (Hazardous Materials Business Plan or HMBP), underground storage tank monitoring (UST facilities), above ground storage tank monitoring (AST facilities), accidental release response planning for extremely hazardous materials (Cal ARP facilities), and hazardous waste generator reporting and management. The number of regulated businesses shows little change over the past few years.



Environmental Health carries out this state-mandated program through certification and oversight by the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal EPA). Mandated services are inspection-related activities, but we also spend time offering consultation, education and compliance assistance to regulated facilities.



In 2009, considerable time was dedicated to the new Aboveground Petroleum Storage Act (APSA) program. This program requires businesses with above ground tanks over specified capacities to develop and implement spill prevention and countermeasures plans. These new requirements apply to over 25 businesses in Plumas County.

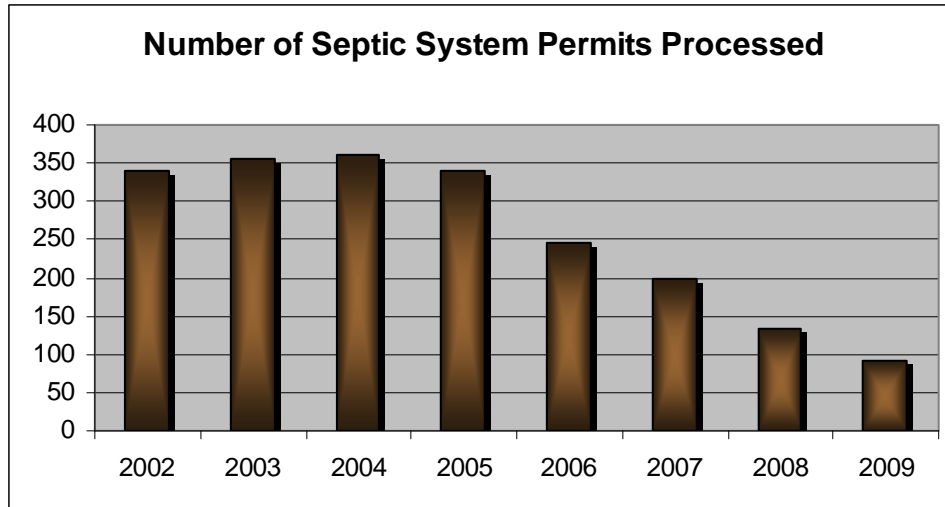
It is important to note that Plumas County also provides the full range of CUPA services to Sierra County under contract.

### LIQUID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Our liquid waste program ensures that wastes are properly handled, treated and disposed to protect public health and the environment. This includes preventing direct and indirect exposure to contaminated wastewater as well as preventing contamination of surface and groundwater. We review and approve the location, design, construction, installation and repair of all on-site sewage disposal systems through a permit and inspection program.



In 2009, the total number of septic system permits issued was just less than one hundred. Compare this with the peak numbers issued in 2003 and 2004. This trend is consistent with building and construction-related permit trends statewide.



A continuing concern in the liquid waste program is development of statewide onsite wastewater regulations as required by AB 885. Considerable time, effort and resources have been spent trying to develop flexible and implementable statewide regulations. The range of climatic, topographic and hydrologic conditions seen across the state has made this process extremely complex. Nonetheless, Plumas County and other rural counties continue to participate on the statewide task force to develop these regulations. We hope these efforts will lead to regulations that are not overly costly to Plumas County residents or overly burdensome to an already heavy-hit local building and construction industry.

## FOOD SAFETY

Our food safety program helps protect the public from food-borne illness. Food safety is achieved through education, outreach, and inspection of retail food facilities countywide for compliance with the California Retail Food Code. Registered Environmental Health Specialists are authorized to inspect, record and correct violations of safe food handling practices, and even close the facility if necessary to protect public health.

A big part of our food safety program includes public education and outreach. As part of that effort, all fixed food facility inspection reports are available to the public on the internet. Accessed through the Environmental Health web page at [www.countyofplumas.com/publichealth/envhealth](http://www.countyofplumas.com/publichealth/envhealth) inspection reports are available by geographic location and date of inspection. On-line access to these



inspection reports has been very popular. Since posting began in 2008, 741 inspection reports have been posted for public review.

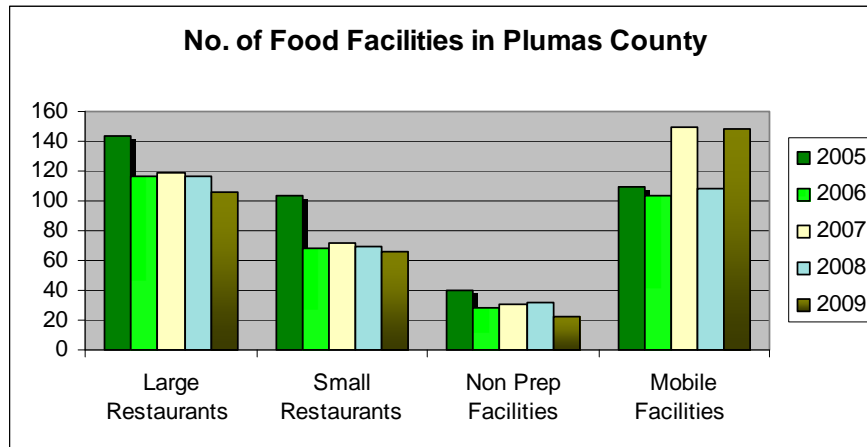
Another important part of the food safety program is food handler knowledge and certification. Starting in 2003, Environmental Health began administering



Serv-Safe food safety certification exams for retail food handlers. Although this certification is available from private vendors, offering it locally provides advantages to the facility operator and demonstrates Environmental Health's commitment to food safety. The decrease in the number of exams given in recent years reflects the 5 year renewal cycle. Nevertheless this remains a

popular service due to its local availability and flexibility.

In Plumas County, the inventory of retail facilities include large restaurants (with a seating capacity of more than 25 or food preparation area in excess of 500 square feet), small restaurants, non-prep facilities such as convenience markets, and mobile or temporary facilities serving community events and the county fair. The inventory of facilities operating in Plumas County since 2005 is as follows:



Though not as dramatic a decline as seen in the liquid waste program, the numbers of large and small restaurants and non prep facilities shows a declining trend over the past few years. Somewhat contrary to this trend is the number of mobile facilities serving food at community events. Environmental Health ensures food safety by permitting and inspecting about 150 of these vendors each year.

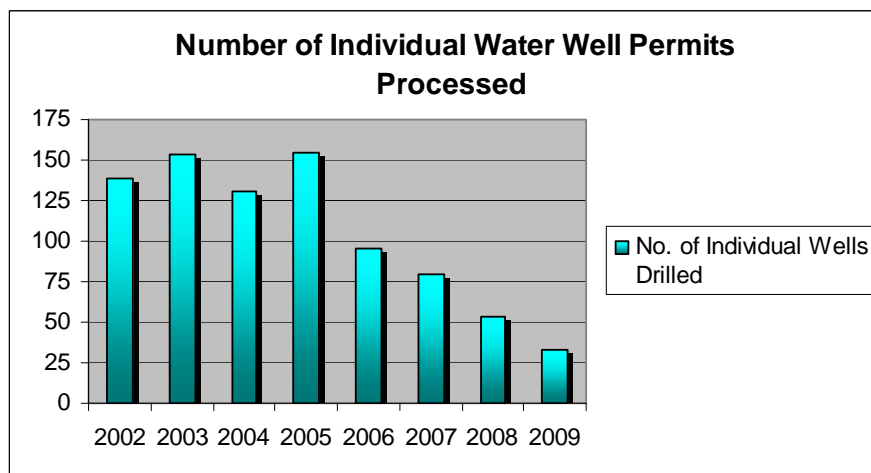


## WATER QUALITY ASSURANCE

Protecting the quality of Plumas County's lakes, streams and groundwater supplies is core function of Environmental Health. The range of this work includes a variety of collaboration, education, testing and permitting functions. A few highlights from 2009 are included below.

Since receiving accreditation for water quality testing from the California Department of Public Health, Environmental Health now offers certified water quality analysis for coliform bacteria and E. coli. During 2009, the first full year of accredited laboratory service, a total of 70 water samples were analyzed. Of those samples, 54 (77%) were submitted as routine water quality checks and 16 (23%) were requested to investigate potential water contamination problems. This local resource is a fast, efficient and local alternative to water quality testing offered by private laboratories in Chico or Reno.

Another important part of water quality assurance is the well protection program. Plumas County is highly dependent upon groundwater for domestic, commercial and agricultural uses. Unless properly located and constructed, water supply wells can compromise the quality of this valuable resource. Through our permit and inspection process, we ensure all wells meet the appropriate state and local standards. The number of individual wells drilled in Plumas County since 2002 is shown on the chart.



In addition to the water quality protection work mentioned above, Environmental Health continued its work with the California Department of Fish and Game to monitor domestic wells for chemicals used in the treatment of Lake Davis. We also started a grant-funded project with US EPA to identify potential sources of groundwater contamination through industrial and commercial septic systems. Known as underground injection control, this project will be completed next year.

## SOLID WASTE

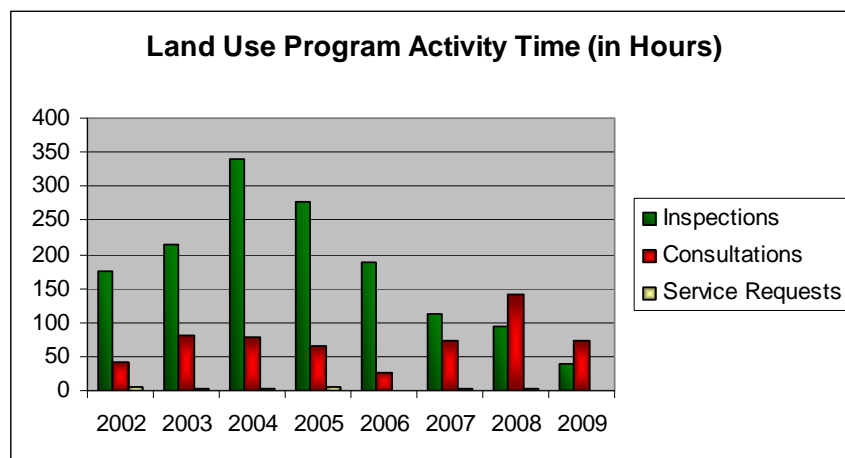
After many years in a four county agreement with Lassen, Modoc and Sierra Counties, Plumas County Environmental Health received state certification for the solid waste program in July 2008. Designated as the Local Enforcement Agency or LEA, Environmental Health is responsible for ensuring the proper, safe, and sanitary handling of the county's solid waste. We inspect and permit county landfills, transfer sites, and investigate old or abandoned sites for hazards. Environmental Health staff also responds to complaints about litter, debris, and illegal dumping.



In 2009, Environmental Health staff completed 46 inspections and handled 17 complaints which resulted in 84 field visits. We also successfully completed the California Integrate Waste Management Boards first annual program review which confirms the local inspection and enforcement program complies with state standards.

## LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

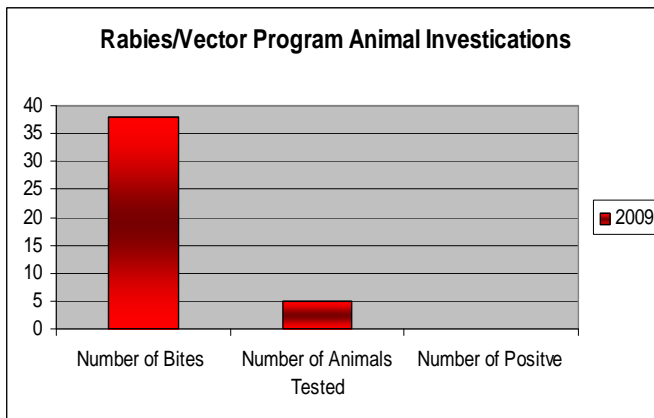
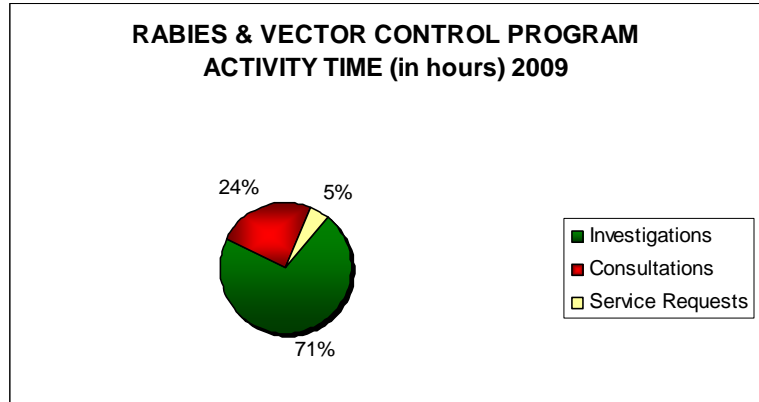
Working in concert with Planning and Building Services, Engineering, Public Works, and other state and local agencies, we evaluate proposed planning and development projects for compliance with environmental



health standards, practices and regulations. This helps ensure today's projects meet the environmental health needs of the community for years to come. As noted on the chart above, land use inspection trends mirror those seen in the septic system permit and well permit programs.

## RABIES AND VECTOR CONTROL

Our rabies and vector control program protects the public from exposure to vector-borne diseases such as rabies, hantavirus, plague and West Nile Virus. We closely coordinate with state, federal and local partners while performing exposure investigations, environmental surveillance, consultation and other activities.



In 2009, Environmental Health tracked and investigated over 35 animal bite cases for potential rabies exposure. Preventing rabies through the timely investigation, testing and risk assessment of potential rabies exposure is a critical function for Environmental Health. Although no animals tested positive for rabies in 2009, the rabies virus is

considered active and present in wild animal populations such as bats, skunks and raccoons. Monitoring this disease in domestic animals to prevent human illness is an essential role for Environmental Health.

## RECREATIONAL HEALTH

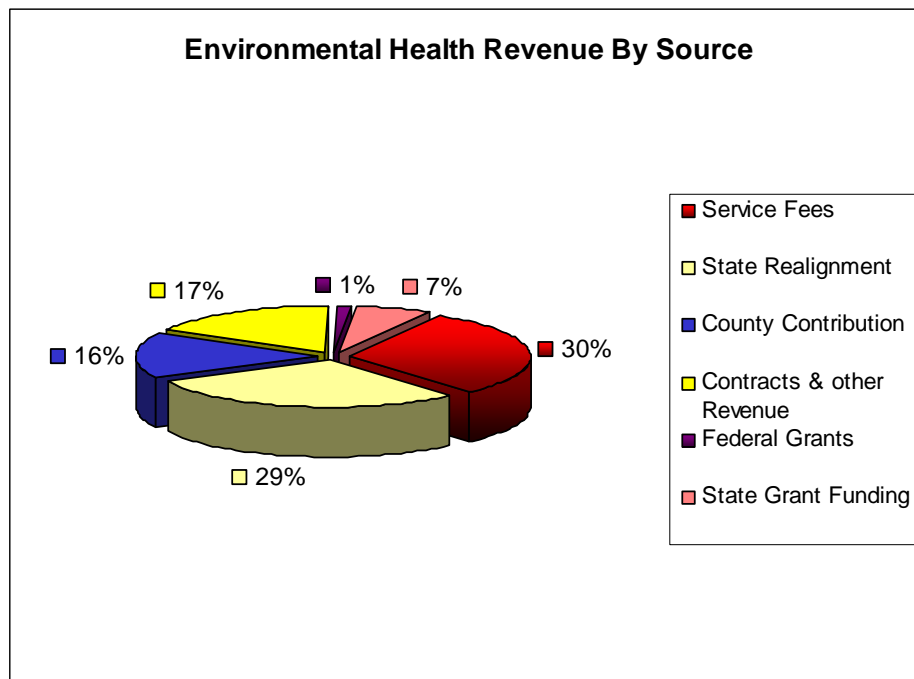
Our recreational health program helps ensure bather safety and prevent disease by ensuring the safe and sanitary operation of public swimming places. Besides routine inspection and permitting activities, this year we spent time informing owners and operators of necessary upgrades and new requirements for suction system and main drain plumbing systems in public pools and spas. Additionally, in cooperation with the Almanor Basin Watershed Advisory Committee (ABWAC), we sampled and monitored the bacterial quality of popular recreational beaches at Lake Almanor.

## HOUSING AND INSTITUTIONS

The housing and institutions program helps assure that rental housing, day camps, organized camps, and institutions (such as the jail) are maintained and operated in a safe and sanitary manner. This is important because the condition of our housing is a significant indicator of the health, social and mental well-being of county residents.

## BUDGET AND REVENUE

Environmental Health revenue sources include Fees for Service, State Realignment, State Program Reimbursement Grants, Contracts for Services, and County Contribution. The 2009 funding sources are summarized below.



While service fees and state realignment revenues are reduced from the previous year, these funding sources continue to comprise the bulk of Environmental Health revenue. Increases in contracts for service and grant revenues have made up the difference in 2009. Examples include our ongoing work administering the CUPA program for Sierra County, well sampling work for the California Department of Fish and Game, and the recent underground injection control work under contract with the US Environmental Protection Agency. Helping to fund ongoing environmental health programs and responsibilities through contracts and grants has allowed us to maintain existing levels of service without increasing service fees.

## LOOKING FORWARD

The biggest challenge facing Plumas County Environmental Health may well be our ability to maintain well-trained, effective staff across the breadth of environmental health programs that we administer. As noted above, the scope of Environmental Health covers a wide range of issues and programs. The effective Environmental Health practitioner must be part microbiologist, part chemist, part geologist and part educator. They must be equally comfortable on a construction site as in a retail food facility kitchen.

The statewide trend in Environmental Health practice is toward specialization, where each staff is responsible for just one program area such as food or liquid waste. In some urban areas, each staff may be responsible for only one part of a program such as food facility plan checking. While this trend is understandable given the increasing complexity of issues, regulations, and programs we administer, rural counties do not have the economy of scale for specialization in every program area.

One alternative is regionalization, where counties share specially trained and certified staff to administer a specific program. Another alternative is to decline local program implementation and rely on state agencies and staff. With either alternative, program quality can suffer. Lack of local control, lack of inspector accountability, lack of staffing flexibility and expensive program implementation can all be issues.

The challenge for local, rural environmental health programs is to attract, train, and retain a work force interested and capable in working across a wide range of programs. This "generalist" approach results in staff who are responsive to local needs, able to provide efficient service, and capable of responding to new programs and emerging environmental health threats.

In Plumas County, we are fortunate to have such an Environmental Health work force. Our challenge is to sustain it through difficult economic times.

Jerry Sipe, Director  
Plumas County Environmental Health