

2014 ANNUAL HEALTH OFFICER REPORT

“By law, every town in Vermont must have at least one Town Health Officer (THO) who is nominated by town government officials and appointed by the Commissioner of Health for a three-year term.” [*Vermont Town Health Officer Manual, 2012*] Vermont Statutes define the role and enforcement authority of the THO...to investigate and mitigate any potential or existing public health hazard in the town. The Select Board in Lyndon is the actual Board of Health and we work together to oversee our town’s public health and safety. Public health hazards are defined by law [18 VSA: 2(9)] ...”potential harm to public health by virtue of any condition or any biological, chemical or physical agent.” This can run the gamut of decaying or poorly handled animal remains, inappropriate disposal of excrement, misuse or misapplication of household/industrial/agricultural chemicals, poorly maintained public access areas – these as examples. As health officer, it I may conduct inspections on rental housing when a complaint is forthcoming. I strive to work with property owners, involving them early in the process to encourage voluntary understanding and compliance of Rental Housing Health Codes.

The majority of issues this past year had to do with tenant complaints. In Lyndon, this THO works closely with the Select Board, Municipal Administrator and police department to address public issues, with clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each office. In most cases, the issues could be resolved amicably with understanding between tenant and landlord. Some issues include: suspected mold (although, even the CDC states that “mold is everywhere”) beyond acceptable measures, smoke in residential areas – from outdoor furnaces or a kiln, lack of adequate utilities as with broken water pipes or heating units, infestations as with mice or bedbugs (only confirmed once and immediately dealt with by landlord), failed septic systems, and winter access issues. Working with the town police department on one call, an apartment was deemed such a health/safety hazard that an Emergency Health Order was issued. That order was resolved with total compliance from the tenant and the landlord to mitigate the offending potential safety hazards. The THO is also responsible to keep records of reported dog bites in the town, though usually nothing more than keeping records for historical reference is required. It is noted that this year the number of reported dog bite calls is down – perhaps in part due to the conscientious oversight of the town animal control officer and the licensing program.

Again I share a couple Vermont Department of Health websites that have much information about public health rules and regulations and division programs: <http://www.healthvermonters.info> and <http://healthvermont.gov> Of course I am available to answer questions and provide support too. Thank you for the opportunity to serve these many years.

Lorraine C. Matteis, Town Health Officer
lomatteis@charter.net
626-8589